

What is Social Communication?





Social communication is the way we communicate with other people in different situations. It can involve:

- Greetings
- Asking questions
- Sharing information e.g. facts, news, your opinion
- Showing/sharing your likes or dislikes
- Building friendships
- Expressing your feelings
- Playing
- Using words, gestures, signs, pointing, facial expressions
- Using visuals and AAC
- Phone calls, texting
- Writing, making art, reading

It is important to recognise and celebrate **neurodiversity** and be aware that people communicate differently. For example, some people with social communication differences do not feel comfortable using eye contact, whilst others do. Some may enjoy sharing facts about their special interests whilst others like to ask questions. Some may ask for support in building friendships whilst others prefer to play alone.

Children and young people should be supported to explore their own communication identity so that they can identify how they communicate and listen best and let others know how to support them (e.g. by reducing brightness of the lighting or by moving to a quieter/less busy space for the conversation.)

- **Provide structure** - Children with social communication differences can find it difficult to manage transitions and changes in their routines. Visual supports can help to prepare your child for changes and to build structure into their day. Examples you could try:

<p>Visual timetable</p> 	<p>Use sand timers to show your child how long they have before the activity finishes.</p> 	<p>Checklists, e.g. getting ready for bed, dressing for school.</p> 	<p>Task planners</p> 
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- **Make it visual** - spoken language is easier to understand when there is visual support. Gesture, objects, pictures and/or symbols can be used alongside talking. Try to give demonstrations of an activity before asking your child if they want to join in.
- **Give time** - after giving an instruction or explanation, give 'thinking time' so that your child has time to think about what you have said and then respond to you. Try to count to 8 in your head before repeating or rephrasing the instruction. Avoid asking lots of questions – just give your child time to process and respond. Starting a sentence and pausing can be a great way to give your child chance to join in – e.g. 'So at lunchtime you went to the

- **Emotions** - model communicating your own emotions and use visuals to show how you are feeling. Support your child to share how they are feeling. Talk about how their brain and body feel when experiencing different emotions e.g. 'my heart beats fast when I'm excited' or 'I want to shout when I feel angry'
- **Emotional regulation** - visual tools like the Zones of Regulation® (by Leah Kuypers) will help children to understand, explain and begin to cope with their emotions. It is important to support your child to find the strategies that work for them. If your child sees an Occupational Therapist, ask them for suggestions.
- **Communication identity** – children should be supported to explore their own communication identity and what works best for them. For example; 'It gets really loud when there are lots of people in the room so I don't like having conversations then. I prefer it when it's calm and quiet.'
- **Celebrate your child's identity** – encourage your child to identify their interests and ambitions. Support them to find opportunities to develop their interests. Maybe they would like to join a club or share what they know about a subject with their teacher or someone in their class.
- **Drawing and talking** - drawing a situation helps to make it more concrete. One approach is Comic Strip conversations (by Carol Gray.) Encourage your child to draw the situation and explore it; understanding what is happening can really help.
- **Join in with play** – Join in with your child's play and share their interests. This creates the best opportunity for fun and communication. Let them lead the game and join in with how their game progresses (make sure you don't start to direct the game!)

Speak to a Speech and Language Therapist for more information and advice on how to support your child



Ealing Children's Services:

[How to help your child work and play with others](#)



Ealing Children's Services:

[How to help your child understand the routine using a visual timetable and now/next board](#)



Ealing Children's Services:

[Using people games to help your child's social interaction](#)



Ealing Children's Services:

[Using Visuals to Support Communication](#)