

Tips from the team: Neurodiverse interaction



We all have different communication styles. Supporting your child with the following areas can be helpful if they want to participate in social situations:

- Sharing our interests and enthusiasms with others
- Self-advocacy/standing up for ourselves
- Perspective taking (on both sides of the interaction)
- Developing awareness of different communication styles and what helps each of us participate in interaction in different places

Here are some ideas for things you can do to help support your child with this area at home and in their community:

- Recognise and value your child's **preferences** and **strengths** and use these as the basis for helping them develop their self-esteem and interaction skills (e.g. if your child is very interested in cars and has lots of knowledge about them, they might enjoy talking about these with peers with the same interest).
- Try to create opportunities for your child to meet **other children with similar interests** where they can interact or engage alongside them in activities they enjoy (e.g. after school clubs or play dates). Recognise that your child might prefer engaging in activities along with one other child over group activities and most children will need time alone also during the day to help them to regulate.
- Remember that everyone has their own **individual communication style** and should be allowed to express their body language in their own way (e.g. eye contact preferences). It is important that we try to tune in to each child's own style and interpret their nonverbal cues.
- Create opportunities for your child to engage in social interaction in **sensory safe environments** where they feel comfortable and regulated (e.g. it might be harder for a child to interact in a noisy busy environment than somewhere quiet).
- Use **visual supports** (e.g. pictures, photos, objects) to help your child stay on topic/on task during interaction and activities. Supports such as visual schedules can also be a good way to help your child with preparing to move from one activity to the next.



- When you are talking to your child try to give them one piece of information/ask them one question at a time and then pause to allow them **time to process** the information and respond. Try to use simple concrete language and avoid non-literal terms.
- Check in with your child that they are understanding information and encourage them to **ask for clarification** if they need it. Explain non-literal and complex language to them if needed (e.g. expressions/idioms).
- Give **specific feedback** to help reinforce communication skills (e.g. 'I liked how you asked me that question' 'well done for standing up for yourself'.)
- Allow your child opportunities to **practise standing up for themselves** and self-advocate for their own preferences (e.g. it is important for them to learn to say 'no' when they don't want to do something, and have opportunities to make decisions about things they do want to do).
- Use **guided questions** to help your child identify ideas for what they could do in specific social situations (e.g. 'what would happen if..?') Support your child with perspective taking and coming up with ideas for **problem solving in social situations** (e.g. 'what do you think he should do next?') Always validate your child's perspective in relation to social situations they have experienced (e.g. 'I can see how that could be annoying for you'.)
- When you are **looking at picture books or watching TV together**, talk about what is happening and how the characters might be feeling. For example, you might discuss the nonverbal cues people are demonstrating and what it could mean (e.g. facial expression, body language, tone of voice etc.)
- Talk about feelings and emotions in context by providing **labels** for the **feelings** as they are being experienced (e.g. 'he's sad because...' 'I can see you are excited...') Provide social commentary as things are happening- explain your thought process out loud, narrate what you're thinking, comment on how you are feeling yourself about different situations.
- If your child has experienced a challenging social situation, you should wait until afterwards when they are **calm and ready** to talk about it. This might help them to think about taking the perspective of others involved and what they could try doing differently next time.
- Using tools such as **Social Stories** and **Comic Strip Conversations** can be useful for helping children understand specific social situations that they find challenging. Ask your SLT for advice on these if required.
- Try to help your child to identify their own goals related to social interaction based on what is really important to them.