## Verbal communication differences in the autism spectrum

<table>
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<th>Communication area</th>
<th>Difference in autism / how this can present in autistics</th>
<th>Strategies for educators</th>
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</table>
| Filtering input    | • Struggle to filter sounds and know which sounds to attend to  
|                    | • Experience sounds as overwhelming  
|                    | • Struggle to look AND listen at the same time | • Keep background noise down &/or let student work in quiet area  
|                    |                                                         | • Let student wear headphones  
|                    |                                                         | • Do NOT require eye contact, ask student to orientate towards only |
| Prioritizing input | • No preference for human voices  
|                    | • Struggle to know what to listen to when  
|                    | • Can get caught up in listening to ‘captivating sounds’ | • Signal to gain attention before speaking using a pre-arranged signal that all students recognise  
|                    |                                                         | • Let student wear headphones |
| Literal language   | • Say what I mean and mean what I say  
|                    | • Interpret language literally  
|                    | • Misinterpret idioms and slang  
|                    | • Use own name not pronouns | • Don’t ask questions unless you are prepared for an answer  
|                    |                                                         | • Say what you mean and mean what you say  
|                    |                                                         | • Model pronoun use |
| Repetitive language/echolalia | • Repeat words or phrases immediately after hearing them; eg repeating a question instead of answering it  
|                    | • Repeat words or phrases after a delay; eg using phrases from a movie  
|                    | • Use scripted language in interactions; eg using a particular phrase to start every conversation | • Model responses but do not correct; eg move on to next part of conversation  
|                    |                                                         | • Try and interpret why that phrase was chosen and respond to probable meaning  
|                    |                                                         | • Teach a variety of scripts for interactions |
| Language skill development | • Uneven skill and vocabulary development eg; higher level vocabulary in areas of interest  
|                    | • May not respond to or initiate speech whilst having reasonable understanding or may talk fluently with gaps in understanding  
|                    | • May not understand/use or notice body language | • Introduce new vocabulary and develop new communication skills through areas of interest  
|                    |                                                         | • Scaffold two way communication, check understanding and provide reasons to communicate needs/wants  
|                    |                                                         | • Narrate your body language; eg I am smiling because I am happy |
| Auditory processing | • May struggle to process speech; eg can only understand 1 step instruction  
|                    | • May need time to respond to questions  
|                    | • May have a perfect auditory memory | • Check how many steps at a time can be processed, then communicate using this  
|                    |                                                         | • Provide the required time and teach peers to provide time  
|                    |                                                         | • Use this to aide leaning (rote) |
| Use of context     | • May monologue on topics of interest  
|                    | • May not be able to speak when anxious or distressed  
|                    | • May miss contextual cues that would assist understanding. | • Provide time to talk about interest  
|                    |                                                         | • Provide alternate communication system and do interoception  
|                    |                                                         | • Narrate contextual cues; eg I am saying hello because it is the first time I have seen you today |
| Detail focus       | • May get stuck on one detail of information in verbal form and miss the important chunks before and after | • Check for comprehension  
|                    |                                                         | • Use task checklists  
|                    |                                                         | • Explain, wait, re-explain |