

# Help Sheet

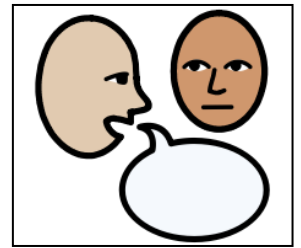
0 – 25 Specialist Teaching and Support Service

## Adapting Adult Language (Adult to Child)

### Why?

Autistic children and young people may have differences in their expressive and receptive communication.

Research also suggests that many autistic children and young people are visual learners (Quill, 1997) and may find it hard to understand and process spoken language on its own.



### How?

#### 1. Gain their attention:

- Say the child's name to cue them in and let them know that you are talking to them.
- Encourage the child to look towards you before you give instructions to ensure they are listening to you. (Eye contact is desired but be aware that for some children this is very difficult so don't insist on it).
- If the child loves singing, you could try 'singing' instructions to gain attention.

#### 2. Keep language simple:

- Keep language simple; use vocabulary that is within the child's understanding.
- Speak using short sentences.
- Stress key words.
- Avoid idioms (such as "It's raining cats and dogs").
- Avoid sarcasm – this may be misconstrued and cause confusion.

#### 3. Allow for processing time:

- Incorporate pauses to allow for processing time: 10 – 15 seconds is a good amount of time to wait.
- Avoid simply immediately repeating the instruction/question as this interrupts processing and delays the response.
- Consider speaking at a slower rate to allow the child to process what is being said/asked.

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### 4. Break information down into chunks:

- For example, “Coat off”, “Sit at table”, “Get your book out.”

### 5. Say the instructions in the order they will happen:

- E.g., “Ben, coat on, gloves on, then outside.”

### 6. Use visual cues:



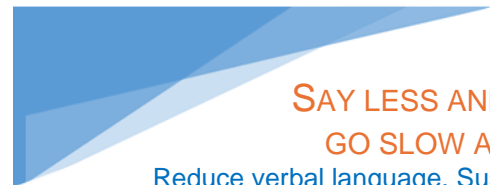
- Wherever possible use visual cues i.e., objects, pictures, symbols, gestures etc. alongside verbal language to support understanding.
- Photographs, pictures, objects, small world figures, puppets etc. can be used as prompts and reminders of what the child has done or to scaffold play situations.

### 7. Say what you want to see:

For example, rather than “Stop shouting out in class”, try, “You can ask me a question when I have finished giving the instructions.”

### 8. Reduce the number of questions you ask:

- Questioning can put children under pressure to respond. Listen to what the child says and then respond with a comment or expand what the child has said with one or two words rather than a question e.g., child says “my coat” adult says “yes, your coat, blue coat.”
- Avoid rhetorical questions as these can lead to confusion.



### Evidence base – informed by

Kathleen A. Quill (1997), Instructional Considerations for Young Children with Autism: The Rationale for Visually Cued Instruction, Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 27: 697-714.