STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

THROUGHOUT THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

Specialist Teaching & Learning Services
Environment

**Sensitivity:** Children with social communication difficulties can be very sensitive to light, movement and noise.
- Try to provide a calm, structured environment.

**Visual Timetable:** This gives structure to the day. The child can see what comes next and learns to recognise the pattern of the session.
- Try and ensure the environment is supported by photos / pictures.

**Circle/Story/Register Time:** Often the child will prefer to have his /her own space.
- Try a special carpet square that the child will recognise as their own, when they see it on the floor they will begin to know it is time to sit down.

**Task Setting:** Children with a lack of social interaction need plenty of repetition to learn new skills. They also need lots of opportunities to generalise the skills learnt.
- Try positioning the work area in a quiet place. Some children do not like other children passing them, so place their chair facing out from the wall (not towards it).
- Try working with only one toy or activity at a time and keep the rest out of sight.
- Have the activity in a basket on the left of the child’s table. When it is finished, it goes in a basket on the right of the table.
- Keep the tasks manageable, e.g. if the child can only complete 2 pieces of a puzzle, only remove 2 pieces.
- Visually show the child what to do.
- Make sure the child succeeds.
- If the child can only concentrate for 3 minutes, they are successful if they achieve this; target 4 minutes next time.

**Choices:** The child is often confused by too many choices.
- Show the child 2 activities (car & sand) and let them choose.
- Objects themselves can be used or photographs or symbols.

**Chill Out Zone:** The child often finds his environment stressful.
- Try creating a quiet area where he knows he can calm down.
**Language**

- Say the child’s name first – then give the instruction.
- Simplify the language used, by using keywords e.g. “Tom, sit down” not “come and sit next to me Tom”.
- Visually support all language e.g. signing, symbols, pointing and demonstrating.
- Use the same words every time for things e.g. “drink” for juice, milk or water.
- If you repeat an instruction, use exactly the same words again. If you change them, the child has to start re-processing all over again.
- Use names instead of pronouns – “give car to Meg” not, “give car to me”.
- Encourage the child to show what he wants – don’t anticipate his needs too quickly, but don’t leave it so long that he becomes frustrated.
- Use photos of objects that the child normally uses e.g. drink, biscuit, favourite toy etc.
- Use photos to support your own language e.g. a picture of a cup with “drink” written underneath.
- Don’t insist on eye contact, sometimes it is hard to listen and look at the same time.
- Start a “home/nursery” book, to record what the child has done at home and at nursery; this then becomes a basis for shared discussion later.
- Keep your voice calm and slow, especially if the child is becoming stressed.
- Don’t ask long questions e.g. “do you want to play in the sand?” Show him the sand and the lego and say “sand or lego”.
- Break instructions down into small achievable steps.
Social Communication

To encourage eye-contact: children with social communication difficulties find this very difficult.
- Try sitting/kneeling at the child’s level.
- Hold an object that the child wants, parallel to your eyes, just above your shoulder.

To encourage participation: at circle/register time.
- Use a special carpet square for your child
- Blowing bubbles near the carpet square will often encourage him to join the group
- When calling the register, have their name at the beginning, he will then wait for his name, respond (a glance, a nod) & then move onto an activity. Gradually place the child’s name further down the register.
- Always ensure that the child has a good view of the story book/object etc, to maintain interest

To encourage initiation: it is important to create the need to initiate.
- If the child wants something, pretend you don’t understand immediately and they may take your hand to show you or they may point.
- Rough & tumble games will encourage the child to initiate eye contact e.g. swinging child round and stopping, child may lift his hands to repeat activity; say “again” or “more” and repeat the action. Stop again and eventually wait for the child to ask by look or word.

To encourage interaction: this social skill is very important to develop.
- Play alongside the child and make your game very interesting, e.g. using loud noises, large movements, etc., the child may pause or copy.
- Copy what the child is doing but make it more stimulating.

To initiate a turn taking activity: this is the beginning of shared activity time.
- Use an activity that needs several pieces to be put together e.g. a rocket that explodes or a “marble run”.
- The adult & child take turns (give one piece at a time)
- The child presses the button/knocks bricks down when complete.
Behaviour

Difficulties changing activities: this is often a very difficult area.

Try-
• giving a warning that the activity will change, using an egg timer or counting down
• saying “finished” supported by a visual sign
• saying what will come next e.g. “trains finished, drink time”
• showing the child a picture of what will happen next.
• being consistent – stick to what you have said
• using the word “stop” rather than “no”.
• telling the child what he should be doing rather than what you don’t want him to do e.g. “put your hands on your knees” rather than “stop flapping”.
• keeping toys out of sight that the child continuously wants
• consistency of approach with all staff.
• praising good behaviour whenever possible e.g. “good sitting”, “good listening” etc - this will promote positive self esteem
• ignoring negative behaviour wherever possible
• providing a quiet area for child to use when needed - limit time spent there

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