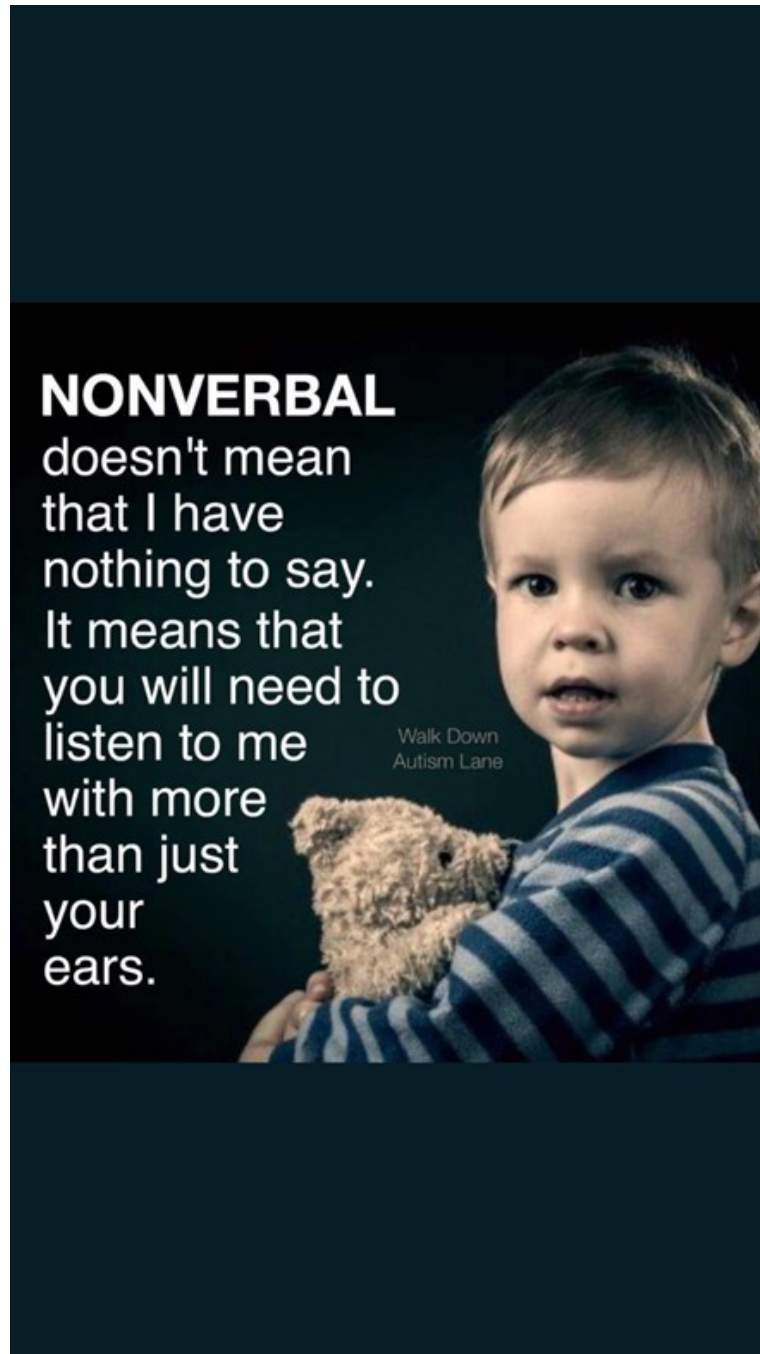


Before The Talking Starts



NONVERBAL

doesn't mean
that I have
nothing to say.
It means that
you will need to
listen to me
with more
than just
your
ears.

Walk Down
Autism Lane

The Importance of Play in Building Pre-Verbal Skills

Before the Talking Starts!

Children are generally identified in the Early Years by parents or care givers as having a communication difficulty because of an absence or delay in their talking skills.

Before children can learn to talk however, there are a number of building blocks which have to be in place to support language development.

The Building Blocks of Communication Pyramid



As adapted from 'Let's Talk' Parent Leaflet - <https://www.lets-talk.scot.nhs.uk/>

Taking it at your child's pace

The Building Blocks of Communication Pyramid shows the importance of play in the development of communication skills. Play helps children to learn: people and toys can be interesting; that socialising with others can be rewarding and purposeful; and offers a role-modelling for language and social skills for children to copy.

All children are different and so is every child's desire to play or communicate with people and the world around them. Some children have little interest in doing this or can find it really challenging. These children require extra support and encouragement to find value in relationships with others and support to develop curiosity in play.

It is through spending time with others and exploring play that children begin to develop the **Pre-Verbal Skills (Eye-Contact, Turn –Taking, Imitation, Cause and Effect, Anticipation, Listening Skills and Shared Attention)** they require to motivating them to communicate.

Listen with your Eyes

A huge majority of our communication (that includes communication in typically developing children and adults) is non- verbal!



Pre-Verbal children require others to 'listen with their eyes' to identify the subtle pre-verbal messages that allow them to have their voice heard.

What non-verbal communication might look like in your child

When you think about your partner, best friend, child etc you will automatically think of the way they move, their stance, the gestures they use and you will automatically know that individual for those behaviours. You will also notice subtle changes to those behaviours and recognise what that says about how they are feeling on that particular day - without them saying a word!

We all use non-verbal communication and gestures, some which are universal to everyone, others which are unique to us.

Here are some universal non-verbal methods of communication your child might use. Take a look in closer detail to see what your child does to make those gestures unique and meaningful to them!

- Making or holding eye contact
- Use eye gaze / eye tracking movements to show what they want
- Reaching Out
- Using gestures – pointing, movement or actions
- Sign-a-long
- Sounds, vocalisations and tones
- Taking an adults hand or leading an adult to what they want
- Crying – becoming upset or demonstrating distressed behaviours
- Using body language
- Use of Facial Expressions
- Copying You

Developing Pre-Verbal Skills through Play



Increasing Eye Contact helps children to:

- Notice other people and things in the world around them.
- Learn to use eye-contact to connect with other people and build relationships.
- Learn to about feelings and communicating needs
- Looking at the face and learning how to mimic mouth movements etc

• **Play Includes: People Games / Peek-A- Boo /Fun classes and hats/Scarves/Tickle Games**



Learning about Turn – Taking helps children to:

- Recognising patterns in conversations e.g. your turn to talk, my turn to talk!
- Learning to 'wait', 'listen' and 'take turns' in conversations.
- Becoming socially aware
- Build social relationships

• **Play Activities Include: Any Turn-Taking Games /Car Runs / Rolling a Balls / Building Towers Together**



Encouraging Imitation or copying others helps children to:

- Learn about themselves and others.
- Showing interest and copying behaviours communicates encourages participation.
- Children learn about their world and functional use of objects .
- Hear the naming word for objects in world around them in context.

• **Play Activities Include: Action Songs, Signing, Words Games, Small World Play, Doll Play**



Developing Cause and Effect helps children to:

- Learn that if they do something, they can make things happen in their world (e.g. In relation to communication - Making noises gets attention / Offering eye contact starts a conversation)
- Helps them to learn that engaging with toys or people can be fun and rewarding.

•Play Includes: Wind up toys, Pop up Toys, Jack in the Box, Pull back and Go Toys, Musical Instruments



Building Anticipation in Play helps children to:

- Become curious and show an interest
- Offer increased attention to see what happens next.
- Begin to think ahead / predict what is coming next.

-Play Includes: Bubbles, Car Run, Feely Bags, 'What's in the Box', Finger/Action Rhymes



Increasing childrens Listening Skills helps children to:

- Learn new sounds, words and phrases
- Relax, soothe, offer emotional support
- Understanding daily routines
- Practise listening and hearing

•Play Includes: Books and Stories / Music and rhymes / Animal or Environment sounds / Instruments / Word Games



Building Shared Attention helps children to:

- Begin to build trusting relationships with shared interests
- Helps children begin to switch their attention between objects and people
- Helps children learn from each other

•Play Includes: Toys of particular interest to the child. Lying beside them and playing with toys that interest them. Describing the child's play. Exploring interesting toys together e.g. 'What's in the Box'

Tips and Hints for helping your child develop pre-verbal skills

‘Listening with your eyes’: - Spend time watching your child without distractions. Get to know all the different cues they use to communicate with you. Try and respond to your child's attempts at communication as regularly as you can. The more they learn that their communication strategies are working for them, the more they will attempt to use it.

‘Make time to play’:- Spend regular, short periods of time playing alongside your child. Try to find activities or toys that will be fun and really engage their interest. Play beside them. Copy their play. Echo their vocalisations. Use simple language. Repeat naming words for objects regularly in context.

‘Offer Choices Regular’:- Encourage your child to make choices and to have an opinion. They might not be able to voice their opinions but that doesn't mean they don't have one. Encouraging children to choose and having a choice will help to motivate them to find a strategy to communicate their message and tell you what they want.

‘Value your role’: - You know your child better than anyone. Recognise the support you can offer daily in role-modelling effective communication skills and creating play opportunities for children who are not in a position to do it themselves.

‘Seek help and advice’:- Parents/Carers often have access a broad range of services that can help you to plan activities and strategies specific to your child's needs: ‘More than Words’ courses, Sign-a-long training, Child Development Centre, Beatlie Focus Sessions, Support from Speech and Language Therapists, Access to a Pre-School Home Teaching Key Worker etc. These services can help you to assess what pre-verbal skill to focus on, offer ideas to try at home and might explore other communication tools to help when your child is ready including: Song Signifiers, Objects of reference, PEC's, Sign-a-long

For more information on developing Pre-Verbal Skills:

Contact your: Speech and Language Therapist

Health Visitor

Pre-School Home Visiting, Key Worker

<https://www.lets-talk.scot.nhs.uk/>

<http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Parent-Tips.aspx>