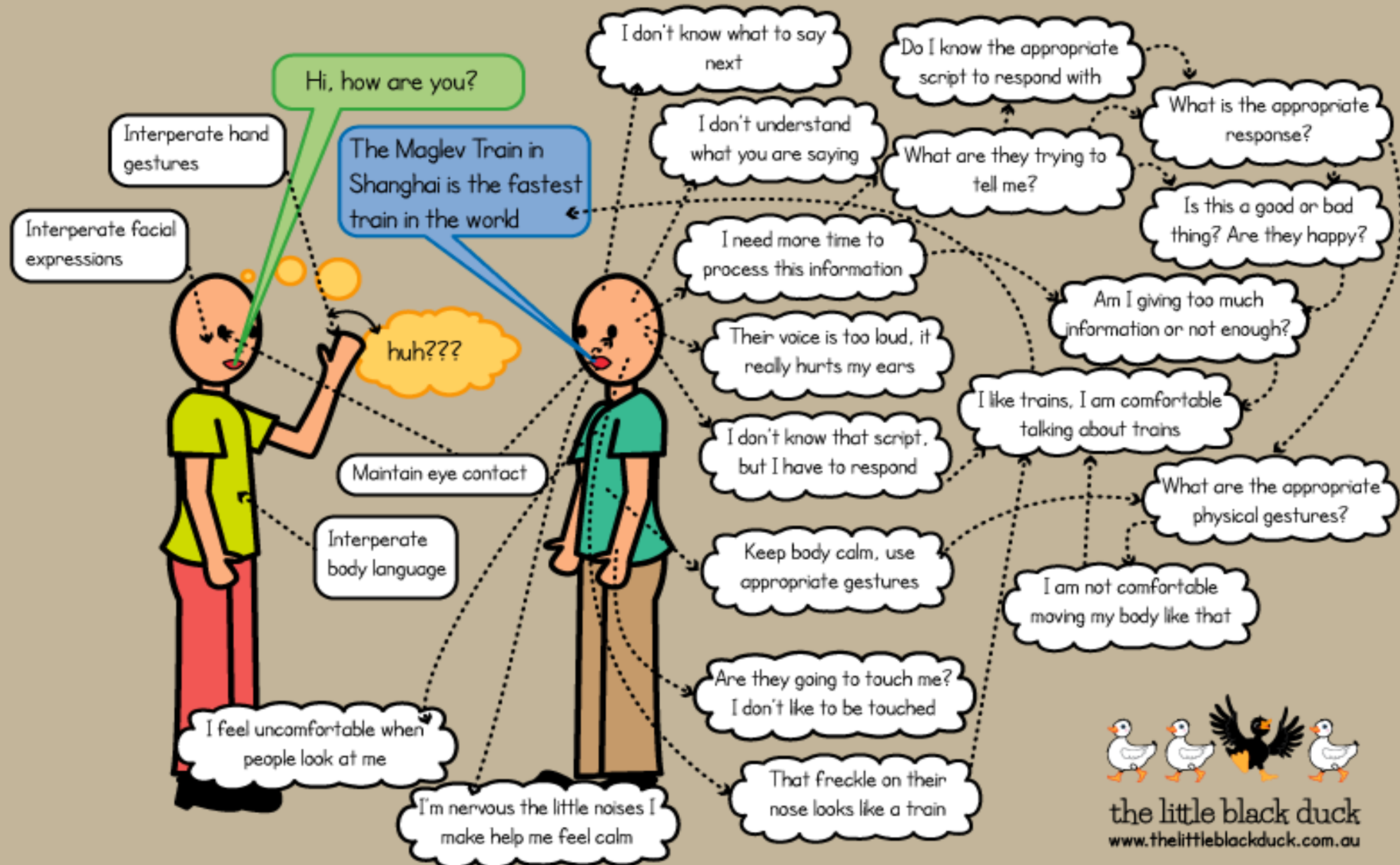


Social Communication in young adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD)

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communication and autism



We'll cover...

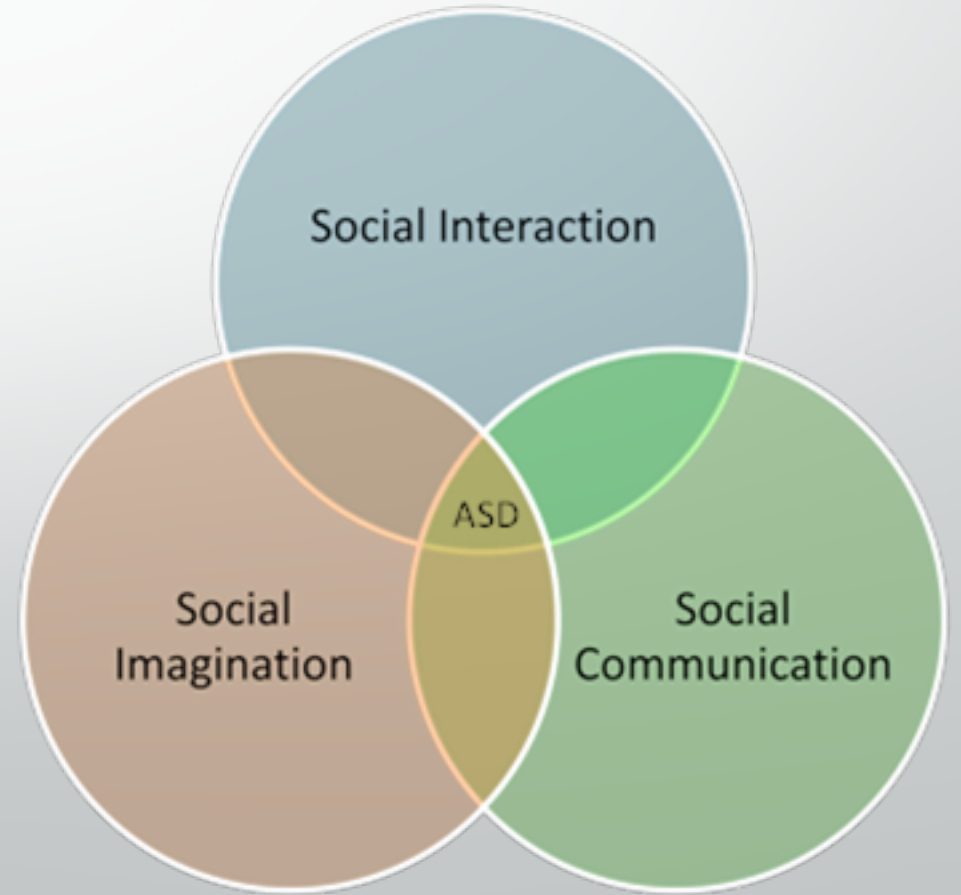
- Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- ASD in young adults
- Social Communication (definition, components, importance, how to improve it)
- Social Communication Disorders
- Strategies for families.

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Triad of Impairments

Range of conditions characterized by

- Deficits in social communication
- Deficits in social interaction
- Restrictive, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities.



ASD in Young Adults

- Many young adults will have gained competence with some skills
 - self-help skills
 - behaviour skills.
- Some of the symptoms of ASD will not go away
 - one third of children with autism will remain non-verbal.
- Many 'systems' do not have sufficient provision for young adults with ASD.
- Young adults with ASD may also deal with other issues
 - ADHD
 - Anxiety
 - Sensory Issues
- High functioning young adults with ASD will likely continue to have difficulties with social interaction and communication.

Social Communication

- This refers to the way in which we use language in social contexts.
- The intricate things we do to navigate through social interactions everyday.
 - Using gestures, body language, facial expressions, picking an appropriate topic and sticking with it, etc.
- Individuals with a diagnosis of ASD or pervasive developmental disorder (PDD-NOS) have difficulties with social communication.



Social Communication Disorder (SCD)

- A new addition to the Diagnosis and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th edition (DSM-5)
- SCD encompasses problems with social interaction, social understanding and pragmatics.
- Pragmatics refers to using language in proper context.
- Some children who would have received a diagnosis of autism under DSM-IV (the previous edition) would instead receive the new diagnosis of SCD.
- However, SCD is not new to speech and language therapists.



Components of Social Communication

There are 3 components:

1. The ability to *use language* for different purposes
 - E.g. to greet, inform people about things, demand, command, request.
2. The ability to *adapt language* to meet the needs of the listener or situation
 - e.g. talking differently to a baby versus an adult, talking louder when there is lots of noise, being aware of the listener's knowledge and giving more information or less when needed.

Components of Social Communication

3. *Following the often "unspoken" rules of conversation and storytelling*
 - e.g. taking turns in conversations, looking at the speaker, standing at an appropriate distance from the speaker, using facial expressions and gestures.

The rules of conversation are often different across cultures, within cultures and within different families. It is therefore important for a person to quickly understand the rules of the person with whom they are communicating.

Importance of Social Communication

- Social communication is important in order to be able to build social relationships with other people. It is also important academically, as many curriculum based activities rely on working in groups and communication between peers.



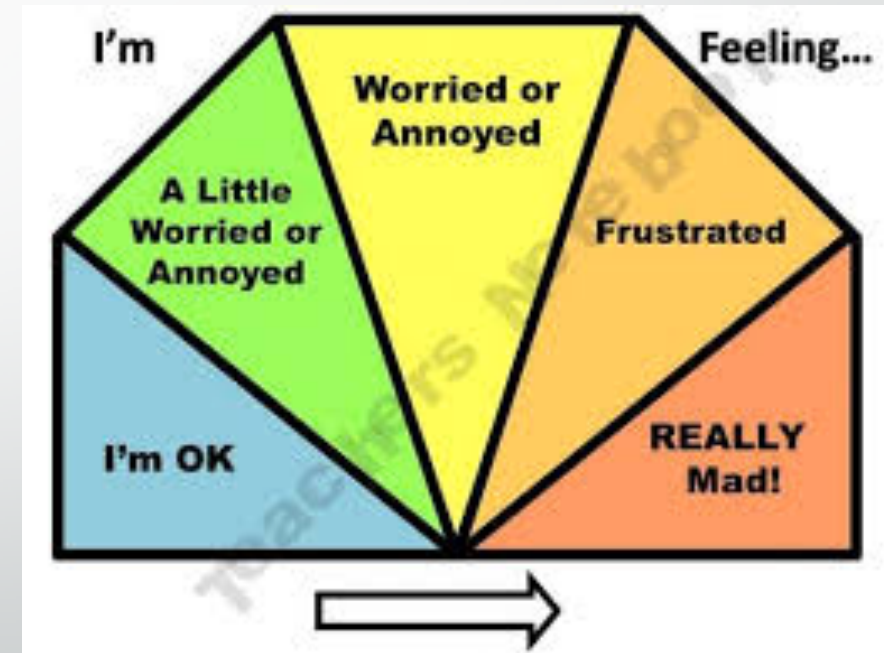
Building Blocks for Social Communication

- **Receptive (understanding) language:** Comprehension of language.
- **Expressive (using) language:** The use of language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas.
- **Pre-language skills:** The ways in which we communicate without using words and include things such as gestures, facial expressions, imitation, joint attention and eye-contact.



Building Blocks for Social Communication

- **Executive functioning:** Higher order reasoning and thinking skills.
- **Self regulation:** The ability to *obtain, maintain* and *change* one's emotion, behaviour, attention and activity level appropriate for a task or situation in a socially acceptable manner.



How can you tell if there's a social communication problem?

If a young adult has problems with social communication they might:

- Have difficulty remaining on topic in conversation.
- Not try to gain the attention of adults because they do not know how to or does so inappropriately.
- Tend to stand too close to the speaker and is unaware of personal space.
- Tell stories in a disorganised way.
- Have difficulty looking at the speaker or may look too intensely at the speaker.

How can you tell if there's a social communication problem?

- Dominate conversations and does not listen.
- Does not ask for clarification when they haven't understood.
- Be unable to interpret the tone of voice in others (e.g. does not recognise an angry versus a happy voice).
- Use language in a limited way (e.g. only gives directions or makes statements but doesn't greet or ask questions).
- Have difficulty understanding another person's point of view.
- Have difficulty making friends.

What can be done to improve social communication?

- Seek the help of a **speech and language therapist** to assess and provide therapy for social communication difficulties.
- **Work collaboratively** with school staff or other therapists to set up joint communication goals and develop strategies to help support the child within the classroom or other settings.

Why You Should Seek Professional Help

- Children with social communication difficulties need professional intervention to develop their social interaction skills. It's not reasonable to expect them to simply "pick up" these skills by spending time with other children. In fact, placing a child with SCD into socially demanding environments without appropriate support can do more harm than good by leading to teasing and isolation.

Why You Should Seek Professional Help

If left untreated, social communication problems can lead to difficulties with :

- Making new friends.
- Maintaining friendships with peers.
- Engaging appropriately with unfamiliar individuals (e.g. shop owner) and with professionals you need to see for appointments (e.g. doctor, dentist).
- Being perceived as 'rude' by others.
- Interacting with colleagues in the work environment.

What will therapy entail?

- One to one sessions with the therapist working on different aspects of social communication.
- Strategies for parents to improve social communication skills at home
 - Therapy is more successful with family engagement. This is especially important for a disorder that affects the social communication. It will be important for you to provide lots of opportunities for your child to practice skills in real-life situations.
- Visual supports and other forms of augmentative and alternative communication for individuals who are non-verbal or minimally verbal.
- Social skill groups.



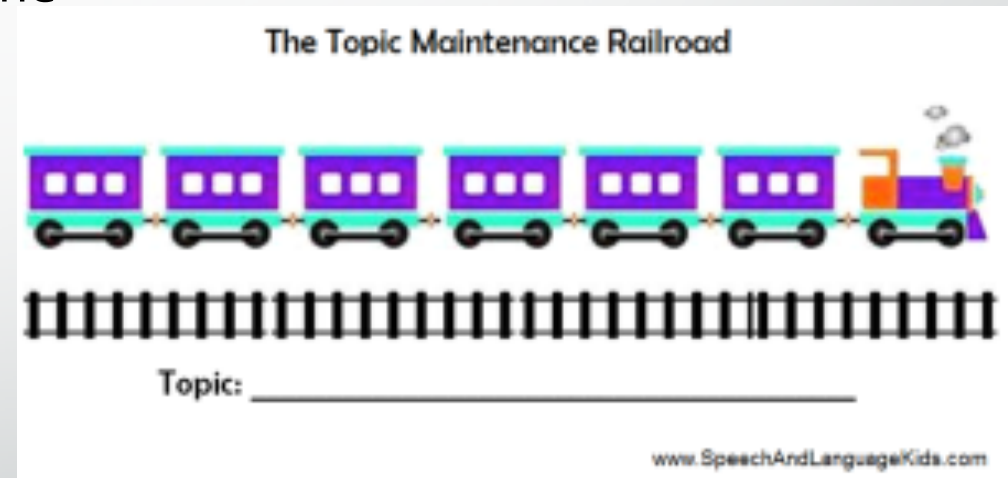
Social Skill Groups

- Social skills groups are small groups (typically two to eight young adults) led by an adult who teaches the group how to interact appropriately with others their age
- Group members learn important skills they will use throughout their lives
 - Greet others
 - Start a conversation
 - Respond to others
 - Maintain a conversation
 - Share and take turns
 - Ask for help



How to Run a Social Skill Group

- Pick a Topic
- Teach lesson, introduce one skill at a time
 - Social Stories
 - Video Modeling
 - Demonstrations
- Students practice
 - Role Playing
 - Answering Questions
 - Pair off or in Groups
- Come back together and sum up / review
- Assign Homework



Strategies for Families

- **Take turns.** Engage in turn taking games, such as board games to teach the child that it is 'okay to lose'.
- **Talk about the feelings.** Books and stories provide a great opportunity to talk about feelings. Suggest why you think a character in a story is behaving or feeling a particular way. Try extending this to real-life situations, privately discussing what a friend or sibling might be feeling .

Strategies for Families

- **Clue into pop culture.** Introduce your child to popular, developmentally appropriate shows and public figures so he can join related conversations with friends and classmates.
- **Use visual supports.** Many children with SCD – like many children affected by autism – process information visually. Visual supports can be particularly useful in helping your child understand expectations and schedules.
 - For instance, you can use a visual support such as a picture of a child talking or an open mouth to cue your child when it's his turn to talk. (See image on the right.)



Strategies for Families

- **Role play:** Engage in role play activities with adults and other children to simulate social situations (e.g. going shopping, going to the park, visiting grandparents).
- **Comic strips:** Use appropriate comic strips that illustrate social situations (do's or don'ts) and talk explicitly about what is happening





Questions???