



Autism disorder

1. Definition:

Speech and language therapy plays a key role in the identification and treatment of Autism. Some of the main symptoms of Autism include impairments in verbal and non-verbal communication skills as well as difficulties in reciprocal social interaction.

Each individual will vary with regards to their level of impairment; some individuals may be unable to speak at all, or have limited speech, as well as difficulties making eye contact, using facial expressions and gestures.

Others may be able to speak and have a wide vocabulary but their speech remains repetitive and non-communicative. Other problems that may also be experienced include; difficulties understanding the meaning of words and sentences, intonation problems, and difficulties in initiating or maintaining a conversation.

Speech-language therapy addresses challenges with language and communication. It can help people with autism improve their verbal, nonverbal, and social communication. The overall goal is to help the person communicate in more useful and functional ways.

2. What a Speech Therapist Does for Autistic People

Autism is a social communication disorder. Some people with autism are nonverbal or have limited oral language skills. Others develop a strong vocabulary quickly, usually related to a special interest, but have difficulty with nonverbal communication.

Speech therapists can play a major role in helping an autistic child learn to communicate with other people.

The first step in speech therapy is an assessment to determine your child's needs and develop a treatment plan. Depending on the setting, your child's therapist may work 1:1 or in groups.

Children often focus on the basics of communication, while adults may focus on more subtle forms of communication for different types of social interactions.

3. How Speech Therapy Addresses Autistic Challenges

Speech therapists address communication and feeding challenges in people with autism in several ways.

➤ Non-Verbal Communication Skills

This may include teaching gestural communication or training with PECS (picture exchange communication system), electronic talking devices, and other non-verbal communication tools.

➤ Alternative and Augmentative Communication

The SLP can also teach how to use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. This technology helps people with autism expand communication, increase social interactions, and promote independence.

➤ Body Language

Speech therapists can teach children how to recognize subtle cues and signals.

➤ Asking and Answering Questions

Autistic children may not develop the ability to ask and answer questions without the help of a therapist.

They can also help your child formulate, ask, and understand the answers to their own questions.

➤ Speech Pragmatics

It's all well and good to know how to say, "good morning." But it's just as important to know when, how, and to whom you should say it. Speech pragmatics training can also help your child understand the meaning of idioms (sometimes hard for autistic people) and use idioms themselves.

➤ Grammar

Some autistic children have a tough time using correct grammar even when it's modeled at home or at school. Speech therapists often work with autistic children to help them correct grammar mistakes.

➤ Conversation Skills

Knowing how to make statements is not the same thing as carrying on conversations.

➤ Concept Skills

A person's ability to state abstract concepts doesn't always reflect their ability to understand them. Speech therapists may work on building concept skills.

➤ Social Skills

Speech therapists often help autistic people to build social communication skills.

Such skills include the ability to ask and answer questions.

➤ Feeding Challenges

A speech therapist can evaluate the particular issue a person is dealing with and provide treatment plans for improving feeding-related challenges.

In general, Speech and Language Therapy for children with Autism aims to address the following areas:

- attention and listening skills
- development of play skills
- motivation to communicate
- social understanding
- understanding of language
- expressive communication skills
- social skills
- non-verbal communication - including means of expression and gestures
- conversational skills
- concept skills
- communicative aids and devices if appropriate

4. How is Autism treated?

It is important that interventions begin as early as possible following a diagnosis of Autism. Autism is a lifelong disability, therefore early intervention can help to maximize an individual's skills and enable them to achieve their full potential as adults.

There is no one standard treatment for Autism, however, appropriate specialist education, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and behavioral management strategies all play an important role in supporting individuals with Autism.

Medication may sometimes be recommended for someone with Autism, for example to help to control any seizures or depression.