

Book Study

Building Communication and Independence for Children Across the Autism Spectrum: Strategies to Address Minimal Language, Echolalia and Behavior
by Elizabeth Ives Field

Learn how to teach communication and social skills to individuals with autism. The author shares composite case studies to demonstrate common issues (i.e., echolalia, pre-symbolic, atypical, behavioral) faced by children with different levels of development and varied degrees of autism severity. A wide range of interventions that address communication and social behavior are covered. This book offers skills that are developmentally appropriate and immediately useful to help individuals with autism express themselves more effectively and build relationships with others.

Introduction and Chapter 1 The People in This Book

pp. 11-26

1. How will addressing communication challenges help to maximize adult potential?
2. What is your favorite thread of philosophy statement (pp. 14 & 15) from the author and why?
3. What are some of the characteristics of autism you see in your child or an individual you support?
4. Which of the three communication groupings (pre-symbolic, atypical language, advance language with gaps pp. 20 & 21) have you observed? What were the characteristics of autism you saw?

5. Explain the meaning of one of the letters from the author's acronym for S-H-I-P.

6. Share what you think is the most important item the team needs to do (pp. 23 & 24) or the most important question to address about goals (pp. 25 & 26).

Part 1

Chapter 2 Communicating Without Speech: Rebecca

pp. 28-38

1. Describe what objects were used with Rebecca. What was an "aha" moment as you read about objects being used for Rebecca's communication system?

2. If applicable: Describe a time you used objects with an individual for communication. What objects worked for them? How did you choose the objects and how did you teach them?

3. How did Rebecca's team store the objects so they were accessible? Have you seen/used other methods to store materials that worked? Please share.

4. In Goal #3, how did Rebecca's team help her build independence as they decreased her dependence on adults?

Chapter 3 Early Language Comprehensions and Expression: Arnie and Sarius pp. 39-54

1. Explain the statement on p. 39 "Communication is bigger than speech".
2. Name two factors that the author shares about how to use reinforcement to teach new communication skills.
3. Explain the importance of teaching the skills and language for "give", "come", and "wait".
4. The author explains in Darius Goal #2 that at first, if all he is doing is trying to escape joint play, you may need to spend time just sharing a snack or lining up his cars and at first, you may need to do short sessions. Explain why this is important.
5. Share some examples of how the author sets up the environment and/or the tasks for success.

Chapter 4 Pre-Symbolic Communication and Emerging Speech: Expanded

pp. 55-70

1. Explain if the following statement is true or false: Using alternative forms of communication will delay speech development.
2. In the "Keep Calm and Carry On" segment in this chapter (pp. 61&62), what are some suggestions that help us aim for cooperation rather than compliance?
3. What does the author mean by the phrase "Teach, don't test"?
4. Which of the points to remember about language modeling (pp. 64-65) have you used or seem most important for the individual(s) you support?
5. Look back at Goal #1 for Darius on page 48. What data would you keep in order to track his progress?

Part II

Chapter 5 Echolalia: Lucas

pp. 72-92

1. On pages 79-82, the author shares how to teach the skill of requesting to an individual who uses echolalic questions to request. What do you like about this approach? How would you apply this approach to your child or a student?
2. Think of how to phrase instructions for one of the following activities using commenting rather than questioning. (See examples page 84)
 - a. Playing a simple board game
 - b. Setting the table
 - c. Your choice
3. A teacher was sharing a book about dinosaurs with a student who is echolalic. Rewrite the teacher's dialogue below using sentence structure that is meaningful so that if/when the student repeats/delay echoes the information, it will be accurate and sound natural. (See pages 88-89)

Dialogue example: "Do you see the dinosaur? Is that dinosaur green or brown? Wow is that a tyrannosaurus? Do you like dinosaurs?"

Chapter 6 Echolalia or Not: Seth and Terek

pp. 93-114

1. Choose a routine an individual with autism might do, such as getting ready for bed or making a snack and write a script you could use as you teach the routine. (See page 103)

2. Think of a person with autism and choose a behavior that you would like them to improve. Write a social narrative to help the person understand the behavior, what not to do, and what to do. Include an incentive plan to reinforce the positive behavior and/or not using the undesired behavior. (See pages 107-113)
3. What new ideas did you take away from this chapter?

Chapter 7 Atypical Language: Expanded

pp. 115-135

1. One of the sections in this chapter is about reading comprehension. What ideas in the section have you tried? What ideas do you want to try? Have you used other successful strategies for reading comprehension with autistic individuals?
2. Which teaching strategies have you used successfully? Are there new ideas you can try?
3. What progress tracking ideas have worked for you? What other ideas would you like to try? How will you use the data?

Part III

Chapter 8 Early Gaps: Mia

pp. 138-151

1. Some of the common characteristics of highly verbal autistic people are shared on pages 139 and 140. Which of the characteristics have you observed and how did they manifest?
2. To help Mia learn how to request a break, the adults can write the words "I need to leave" on a small card and show it to her and tell her she can say this anytime she feels the need for a break. This is an example of using a visual support to increase Mia's communication skills. What are some other examples of strategies from Mia's case study that would support her communication skills? Provide an example for the following:
 - a. Peer Support
 - b. Reinforcement
 - c. Social Narrative
3. What new ideas did you take away from this chapter?

Chapter 9 Still Some Gaps: Grady and Evan

pp. 152-175

1. Discuss the differences between neurotypical people and autistic people in reference to social communication during classroom discussions. What supports can help autistic people understand the purpose and flow of classroom discussions?
2. Create a Problem Page (page 160) for your child or an individual with autism that you support.

3. Many autistic people struggle to find and keep a job. How does teaching communication and executive function skills help with future employment? What strategies for goal #3 used with Evan (page 172) were familiar to you? What strategies were new to you?
4. What kind of supports do you think Evan will need in college?

Chapter 10 Advanced Language with Gaps: Expanded

pp. 176-190

1. The author brought up statements that we sometimes think or say such as “Their parents should have...” or “Last year’s teacher didn’t...”. How can we recognize the daily challenges that autistic individuals face and help professionals and families support that individual to be content in school, at home, and in work situations?
2. Discuss three key points on teaching methods that stood out to you (pages 179-185).
3. What supportive phrase such as “It’s ok. I’ll help.”, do you use to deescalate behavior and lessen anxiety?
4. How can we help individuals with autism, family members, educators, and others to see that all people continue to learn and progress across their lives? How can we help people recognize and track that progress and growth?

Chapter 11 Progress Across the Spectrum

pp. 191-203

1. Of the interventions, methods, and techniques summarized in this chapter, which do you think are the most important to use with individuals you support? Which ones do your family members/school staff/employers use already and which ones would be most important for them to learn and use?
2. What spoke to you in the section about anxiety and autism? How will that change your approach with the autistic people in your life?
3. Which of the suggestions for managing meltdowns will you share with family members, friends, colleagues?