

Children Who Are Non-Verbal or Have Limited Verbal Skills



Some of you may be playing with buddies who communicate differently. Some may not be able to use words, some might. It may take some longer to respond to your words. There are various disabilities that make talking a challenge, like Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Autism. Here are some things to consider if you have a buddy who has challenges communicating with words:

How do I talk to my buddy? Just use a normal voice and speak the way you would with any of your friends. Shake his hand and say hello, just like you would with anyone. Share who you are and talk about what interests you. It may feel odd at first, if you have a buddy who doesn't speak, but remember that your buddy wants to get to know you.

- **Avoiding open-ended questions to help your buddy answer the questions.**

Example: Where do you want to go play? vs. Do you want to go play on the swings? Asking questions that are direct might make it easier for your buddy to find the words to answer you with.

- **Be a good detective, if your buddy can't speak.** How will you know where your buddy wants to play? Observe his face, sounds, hand gestures, etc. How does he react on the swings? Playing musical instruments?

- **You can ask your buddy to repeat himself, if you need to.** It isn't rude. Ask your buddy to repeat and/or slow down so you can understand him.

- **Communicate through play!**

Try talking to your buddy in his/her language. Remember that actions can speak loudly...a hug, throwing a ball, helping your buddy hold a drum and banging on it together, blowing bubbles. **Laughter and play are the best way to communicate!**



Autism? It is a really common disability, it affects how the brain works, how it processes the senses...Noises, smells, light, touch, and sound can overwhelm people with Autism. But here's another important thing to remember. Autism affects everyone in a different way. Some people might be really sensitive to touch, some might not be able to feel light touches. Some people might be sensitive to sound, others not at all.

What if my buddy doesn't want to play with me? Sometimes, people with Autism have a hard time making eye contact, speaking, and being social. Do you ever feel shy? Imagine that feeling times 100. It can make places like lunch rooms or playgrounds pretty overwhelming.

If you have a buddy who is struggling, here are a few things you can do:

- **Find out what his favorite** place to play is or favorite type of activity and start there. Starting with something familiar might make him feel more comfortable.
- Start in a quiet place where there are fewer people, less noise (by a tree reading a book). Find out what sounds your buddy likes (musical instruments, songs) and create those sounds.
- **Be patient and play side-by-side** for a little while. If your buddy moves, stay with him. The more you are around, the more he will trust and open up.
- If your buddy has a hard time with eye contact, try playing side-by-side and mirroring his movements. If he starts to draw, you draw as well. If he is clapping and making a rhythm, grab a drum (or use your hands) and gently join him. That lets a buddy who has no words to communicate with know that you are speaking his language.

What if I do something wrong that upsets my buddy? If your buddy seems upset, we will get his teacher and find out why. If you let your buddy explore the play day at his pace, in his own way, it will be less overwhelming for him. And remember that crying or getting upset is a way to communicate without words. It isn't something you've done wrong. **Don't forget to play! It is the best way to connect and communicate**

Learn More at
<https://inclusionmatters.org/education-program/>

