

Communicating with Children and Young People with Neurodevelopmental Disorder (NDD)

Children and young people with NDD can find it hard to pay attention to what you say

- Always use the young person's name at the beginning of a sentence so that they know you are talking to them.
- Make sure the young person is paying attention before you speak to them. The signs that someone is paying attention will be different for different people.
- If the person has a special interest, use this or the activity they are currently doing to engage them in conversation.

They find it hard to process what others say

- Young people with NDD can find it difficult to pick out the important information in a sentence. If there is too much information, it can lead to 'overload', where no further information can be processed
- Say less, stress important words and say it slowly.
- Pause between words and phrases to give the person time to process what you've said, and to give them chance to think of a response. The processing time will vary depending on the young person
- Don't use too many questions.
- Use visual supports (e.g. symbols, timetables, written lists, Social Stories™).
- Be aware of the environment (noisy/crowded) that you are in. Sensory input may be affecting how much they can process.

They may find open ended questions difficult

- Keep questions short.
- Ask only necessary questions. Do not ask things you know the answer to.
- Structure your questions, e.g. you could offer choices so the language is already provided.
- Be specific. For example, ask “Did you enjoy playtime?” and “Did you have assembly?” rather than “How was your day?”

They may not ask for help

- Give them a visual help card to use.
- If they don't want to stand out to others, they could be encouraged to use other signs of needing help such as taking a highlighter from their pencil case and placing this on their desk.

They may take things literally

- Avoid using irony, sarcasm, figurative language, rhetorical questions, idioms or exaggeration. If you do use these, explain what you have said and be clear about what you really mean to say.