

# Music Therapy Techniques to Improve Communication Skills in Persons with Autism

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Intentional communication involves coordinated attention to object, action or person. Coordinated attention is an early indicator of understanding others' intentions and is a precursor to verbal communication. Intentional communication includes use of gestures, eye gaze, pointing, verbal and non-verbal actions.

**Theory of Mind** refers to the ability to conceptualize that what is going on in someone else's mind may not be the same as in one's own. Not understanding this concept excludes the possibility of understanding or joining in the subtleties of social interchange.

Understanding the "Theory of Mind" concept helps the person understand the following.

- Ability to attribute mental status to self and others in order to understand and predict behavior
- Understanding that seeing, hearing and feeling can be directed selectively as attention
- Attention can be directed and shared by the act of pointing
- Directed attention and interests of another is an underlying motive behind all human communication

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**Joint Attention** is a precursor to understanding "Theory of Mind" and refers to the process of sharing one's experience of observing an object or event by following eye gaze or pointing gestures. Understanding joint attention is critical for social development, language acquisition and cognitive development.

### **To create Joint Attention**

1. **Follow the child's lead**
2. **Talk about what the child is doing**
3. **Imitate the child's utterances and actions**
4. **Expand on the child's utterances**
5. **Manipulate the environment to engage the child**

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To provide **Structure, yet Functional treatment** the therapist must create interactive interventions that occur within predictable routines. The therapist must apply techniques of varied directiveness and pursue practical communication and language goals.

**Structure** refers to the degree to which the therapist controls stimuli, response acceptability and response consequences

**Functionality** refers to the degree to which the therapist uses natural events, objects and consequences in the pursuit of practical goals within typical routines

### **Structured, yet Functional techniques**

**Once a child begins to anticipate turn-taking (routine), the therapist can ...**

1. **Delay with expectant waiting**
2. **Use novel objects or actions**
3. **Omit or forget a critical object needed**
4. **Sabotage materials so they do not work as expected**

## Step by step process to establish intentional communication

1. Follow the child's lead
2. Talk about what the child is doing
3. Imitate the child's utterances and actions
4. Expand on the child's utterances
5. Establish a predictable routine using turn-taking
6. Manipulate the environment to encourage the child to communicate
  - Delay with expectant waiting
  - Use novel objects or actions
  - Omit or forget a critical object needed
  - Sabotage materials so they do not work as expected

## Music Experiences

- Pentatonic bell improvisation
  - *echo experience (imitate child's actions)*
- Down by the Bay
  - *echo song (turn taking)*
- Four in a Boat
  - *use of novel actions*
  - *delay with expectant waiting*
- Leader of the Band
  - *turn taking and imitate the child's actions*
- Jump Down, Turn Around
  - *use of novel actions*
  - *manipulate the environment to engage the child*
  - *omit a critical object*
  - *sabotage materials so they don't work as expected*
- What Do You Do
  - *delay with expectant waiting*
  - *expand on the child's utterances*
- I Have a Dinosaur
  - *talk about what the child is doing*
- I Have a Word and I Can Spell
  - *expand on child's utterances*
  - *delay with expectant waiting*
- Limber Louie
  - *use of novel objects and actions*