

# Improving language skills

## What Does the Pig Say?

Some children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are completely non-verbal, however early intervention can help.

It can often be challenging to maintain the focus of children with ASD. The key to maintain interest is to encourage their participation in activities they find especially enjoyable.

In non-verbal youngsters, any type of appropriate verbalisation is an important step. This exercise focuses on animal sounds, a great way to practise speech.

Visual aids can be especially helpful for children with autism. Print out pictures of animals and cut them out. It might also be helpful to print onto card and laminate for the child to hold.

1. Sit facing the child, and hold animal card within the child's line of sight.
2. Say, "What does the cow (or other animal) say? The cow says Moo". Repeat this same phrasing for each animal card.
3. The next time you run through the cards, say, "what does the cow say?" and then pause. Wait for the child to fill in the sound. It's okay to wait for a while for the child to respond.
4. When the child is able to say all the animal noises, bring out corresponding toy animals and use those instead of the printed visual aids.

# Hints & Tips

**As you promote a child's language skills, keep the following tips in mind:**

- Remember that some children with autism have trouble understanding verbal instructions. If possible, give the activity instructions in a variety of formats.
- Introduce these activities gradually to avoid overwhelming the child. It is best to work on one language-related game at a time.
- Make language activities fun and full of praise, no matter how small the progress. This is hard work for the child, even if you are making it fun.
- Read often and for long periods of time. This exposure to language is important for all children and essential for youngsters with autism.