



PROMPT BLOG

TOPIC: Managing difficult behaviors during communication

Children who have speech and language delays/disorders may sometimes also exhibit difficult behaviors when trying to communicate. Some trouble behaviors can include grabbing items instead of using words/signs, difficulty with the acceptance of “no,” and difficulty transitioning between activities. The following blog post was written by PROMPT Instructors to give parents strategies to correct inappropriate behaviors when they arise and to maximize opportunities for communication at home.

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One of the basic tenets of PROMPT is that human beings are internally and externally driven by mental, physical and emotional domains. Communication requires the integration and balance of all three domains:

Cognitive-linguistic (Understanding, Learning)

Social-emotional (Trust, Interaction)

Physical-sensory (Speech Sound Production)

When communication is disrupted by a breakdown in any one of these three domains, the other domains will be impacted to some degree. For example, children with speech disorders have limitations in the physical-sensory domain which can cause imbalances in the other domains. The child sees a ball and wants it. If he is unable to verbalize “ball” (physical-sensory) then a tantrum may occur because he is frustrated (social-emotional). Working at the level of the child is key. If your child is able to approximate ‘ball’ by saying some part of the word, be sure to acknowledge and encourage the attempt to verbalize the word and use that moment as an

opportunity to model communication for your child. 'Do you want the ball? Here you go!' If the child can't approximate a word, give positive reinforcement for appropriate visual requests (making eye contact, pointing) rather than just grabbing the desired object.

Negative behaviors might also occur when a child requests a desired item such as ice cream and he/she is denied because it is not an appropriate time. Limit setting is important part of managing behaviors. Acknowledge the request while stating why it is not appropriate and then redirect the child's attention to an appropriate activity; "I know you want ice cream but let's eat dinner first, then you can have ice cream. Now let's pick a toy to play with."

If verbal limit setting is not enough or your child has difficulties processing oral messages, it might be helpful to use a picture schedule as well as a visual "First-then" display. A picture schedule (can be picture cards or an app) is a visual representation of daily tasks that can be used to make a plan for the day, as well as assisting in transitions between activities. A visual "First-then" display can be used to show the child which activities must be completed before moving on to the next task or reward. It will help him/her to fully understand what he/she is expected to do and comply with the tasks as well as teaching temporal concepts and organization skills.

Any alternate communication systems used should be utilized to support your child's physical, cognitive, emotional and social development.