

Using Photos to Teach Conversation Skills

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Do you have a photo in your wallet or purse? Your children? Grandchildren? Buster, the family dog? Do you proudly pull that picture out to show your friends or coworkers?

When we search for ways to use visual strategies to improve communication, special photos are an important choice. Photos are great tools to help students engage in conversation and create deeper relationships.

Take a Photo to Talk About

Learning effective conversation skills ranks as one of the greatest challenges for students with autism spectrum disorders and many others with communication challenges.

Where do you begin?

Teaching conversation skills is a huge task. Photos can help. Keep your camera handy. Watch for opportunities to capture events that would be good conversation topics. The photos will provide a bridge to better conversation and social interaction.

What should you take pictures of?

There are lots of possibilities. Look at the world from the student's perspective. Observe what other students talk about. Is there anything this student finds especially interesting? Here are some ideas:

1. **Where did she go?** Take photos when students go someplace that is unique. A vacation or a movie or a trip to the zoo. Don't stop there. Photos of more common activities are also valuable. Going out to eat, visiting Grandpa or going to the playground can also be conversation topics.
2. **What did he see?** There is some road construction at the end of our street. There are big bulldozers and dump trucks and holes in the road. Think of the great conversation that can occur with a few photos to help.
3. **What does she have?** It may not be possible or appropriate to bring a favorite video game or a new bike, but a photo of it will encourage conversation.
4. **What happened?** Life is full of new things or unexpected events. Think about the excitement that comes from telling people that the dog had puppies or that mom crashed the car. But even more regular events are worthy to talk about. If a student is interested in something, it can become a topic to talk about.

Here are more ideas:

- **Practice** - Keep talking about the picture or the event it represents. Help her rehearse before talking to someone else.
- **Write information** - Who is in the picture? What is happening? Try writing what the student will say. Write on a sticky label that you can stick on the front or back of the picture. This can help a communication partner know what to ask or talk about. If the student reads, it can help him remember what to say.
- **Show the student how to use the picture** - Demonstrate how to hold the picture for someone to see. Teach him to say, "Look" or "Guess what I did" or something similar to begin a conversation.

Lots of people take photos. Common practice is to store them in an album or box on a shelf. Instead, make photos a valuable part of each student's communication system. Use them and reuse them. They will make social interaction richer and more meaningful.

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