



**RDI® in the UK Newsletter  
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**It's all in our Communication**

Communication is what makes us, as humans, unique. We communicate in many ways in order to have our needs met, but also to share experiences with others. Communication isn't just about what we say verbally it's also about how we communicate non-verbally with each other. This newsletter will focus on verbal communication and we shall explore non-verbal communication another time.

It is important for us to have our needs met, whether we need to communicate that we are thirsty or hungry or for other primary needs. This type of communication is known as **instrumental** or **imperative** communication. Although these are valuable forms of communications wouldn't life be dull if that's all we could talk about? Other types of instrumental / imperative communication that our children may be using are; reciting scripted words, gaining specific responses, influencing someone to provide a specific response. The common types of communication that parents use with children are;

**Instruction** : "Put your coat on"

- Although it is a useful ability to follow an instruction, there are times when we can use alternative communication. An example of an alternative comment in this situation could be "It's cold outside, I'm going to put my coat on".

**Project Corner**

It's nearly Christmas! Put your Christmas tree up together.

**Project Elements**

There are many steps to this activity and you can think of more or do less depending on the ability of your child. Remember to guide your child and do it together. This project can be done over the duration of a week in small increments.

Planning where the Christmas tree should go.

Collaboration on what colour or themes to have

Making your own Christmas decorations

Putting the tree together (if artificial) or choosing

**Question** : "What colour is this?"

- It is useful for children to respond to questions, but if you know the child knows the answer then there is no point asking the question. An example of an alternative comment in this situation could be "This is purple; I can see something else purple too".

Communication that leads to a better quality of life includes something that is called experience sharing communication. These are often comments, or statements about our own perspective of things.

**Experience sharing** or **declarative** communication invites the other person to share their perspective with you. It is typically a representation of what the mind produces. Because of its invitational nature, the pressure is taken off of the child to respond, making the child feel more comfortable and therefore better able to process what you are saying and produce a thoughtful response, if they want to.

People with autism tend to be slower in processing both the spoken word and their own thought processes so it is vital that we allow our children plenty of processing and thinking time, this varies for each child but as a guideline you could wait up to 45 seconds to allow for their response before you speak again. Experience sharing language can be broken down into different types;

**Sharing emotional reactions** ; "We did it!"

**Comparing/ contrasting** ; "I like the black car more than the blue car"

**Reminiscing/ reflecting** : "Yesterday we went swimming and you swam a whole length!"

**Brainstorming ideas** : "The red brick might fit"

the tree

Deciding where to put the decorations on the tree

Taking turns to put items on the tree

It's a project!

### Interaction Corner

Christmas is a particularly busy time for families and it's very easy to get caught up in all the hustle and bustle so try to make some 'we time' around those things you have to get done, as well as the things you would like to share time together doing, such as:

Choosing and writing Christmas cards

Making lists of who to write cards to

Lists of who to buy presents for

Singing Christmas songs - changing some of the words together if your child can manage the uncertainty

**Planning/ preparing future experiences** : "Tomorrow we are going to make muffins!"

**Affirming your emotional bond** : "I love you"

**Increasing coordination emotions/ efforts** : "You are too far away, I can't reach"

**Repairing misunderstandings** : "Sorry, I meant the big bowl not the small bowl"

Before we can expect our children to communicate in this way we need to ensure that we are using this communication too. As a guideline we should be using **80 % experience sharing communication** and **20 % instrumental communication** . I challenge you to evaluate what you are presently using yourself. If this ratio is not being met then I would suggest that you begin to work on the kind of communication that you are modelling for your child.

Not only does using experience sharing communication provide a wonderful model of communication for our children but it also provides them with more opportunities to be mindful, to think about problem solving, to take into account other peoples' perspectives, to form their own perspective and it also plants the seed for new ideas and thoughts too.

***Elisa Al Malah, BSc Psychology***

***RDI® Programme Certified Consultant***

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### **Alysia's Story - Our Journey** (Part 2)

We were in Atlanta on the RDI® 4 day Parent Workshop and had been in Dr Sheely's afternoon

Making Christmas table decorations or crackers

Wrapping presents

Choosing a present or two for someone together - not too many in one go

Sharing the atmosphere - scents in shops, decorations on display, tasting Christmas goodies, touching materials / possible presents, pointing out unusual things around you

Setting the Christmas table together

Giving presents to others together

Playing with a toy (toys) on Christmas day

Teaming up to play a family board game after Christmas dinner or playing charades

Or going for a walk after eating all that rich Christmas food.

breakout session covering 'Communication'. One of things that Dr Sheely said, that still sticks in my mind today, was of how a parent of a 30+ year-old (considered successful as was holding down a job and living independently) had previously been in this very same communication session and had left vowing to telephone her daughter and not use any questioning of how her daughter's day had been or what she was doing etc. The next day she reported that for the first time she had had a real conversation with her daughter simply because she had removed the pressure by having no expectation of her daughter responding in a specific way, or in fact at all. She had dropped the barrage of questions and her daughter opened up which lead to them both making comments about their individual day and fluidly conversing in an experience sharing way.

After going through some role-play scenarios we left that afternoon vowing to give it a go. That evening we were in a Chinese restaurant with our three children and the ABA tutor that had come with us to look after the children during the day. The restaurant had Chinese lanterns of various shapes and colours and our ABA tutor, who had been briefed, commented 'I have one of those in my bedroom'. Nothing more was said for a good 30 seconds, maybe even longer, then Alysia said 'I like the purple one'. We were totally blown away by this, as it really was the first time a spontaneous comment in which she wasn't just responding to a question came from her lips. Fuelled with this we continued to make comments on / off throughout the rest of the evening and each time, *if we waited*, Alysia would share something of her own with the group. The change in such a short space of time was dramatic!

Coming from ABA making the changes to our general lifestyle took time, but I think for any parents of a child, particularly if that child has ASD, when you feel

Watching a good old (or new) Christmas film, sharing the special moments as you watch and look for each other's emotional reactions.

**Happy holiday!!!**

Contact Details

If you would like to learn more about RDI® and how using it could help someone in your family, please contact either:

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**Sharon Bradbrook-Armit**

like you are getting no feedback as to whether you have been understood then it's very easy to get trapped in 'checking, demanding and questioning' your child. The problem here is you are then falling back into the trap of looking for a particular response and heading in the downward spiral of your child giving just enough to have you back off.

I think the easiest way for me to explain some of the changes implemented is to give an example of our communication prior to RDI® versus how we would now interact (please take into account that we have been following RDI® for five years and your child may not respond as Alysia does at this point in time):

**The way we used to do it - We were aiming at helping Alysia to become more independent**

Following a recipe we would have her do it all while we pointed to the ingredients listed, asked her to get the ingredients, told her to fetch the necessary tools, questioned her understanding of what she was doing, told her how to add, stir, scoop and so on.

**The way we do it now - still aiming at independence but through 'Guided Participation and Declarative Communication '**

Getting started - 'Let's make some cakes', 'Hmm I wonder what we need?'

Sharing out the task with each of us taking roles - commenting 'I'll get the marg' as an invitation for Alysia to state what she will do as part of our team.

If Alysia is stirring too fast 'oohh it looks like it's going to spill out the bowl'. Or if the stirring was hard going instead of taking over (which we would have previously done pre RDI®) 'that looks really hard to

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do' - acting as an invitation to take turns.

If an ingredient is missing 'ohh!' waiting for a response 'it looks a bit dry' or 'I wonder what comes next'. If Alysia comes up with a suggestion then we will respond with 'good idea' or 'ahh!' or 'you're a superstar' or 'silly me I forgot' etc.

Going back to the 4 day RDI® Parent Workshop my main fear was if we are teaming up to do things with my taking on more of the role of things that Alysia was already starting to do, although often prompted through, then how would that create greater independence? Could it create more dependence? The answer to that is in every culture children learn from their parents and peers through 'guided participation' in which the more learned partner gradually hands over more responsibility to the novice - but I'm jumping ahead again, that's for another time!

Good luck with changing your communication style - it really does pay-off so I strongly recommend that you follow Elisa's advice and keep a tally of your own ratio of 'imperative vs declarative communication' and work towards that 80:20 in favour of experience sharing. Once you have that in place watch the difference in the way your child responds to you versus how they respond to others in their environment that still bombard them with questions - when I see this happening with Alysia it makes me cringe and I can physically see her anxiety levels rise, while I try to suppress my blood from boiling. To think I was just as guilty of this when I didn't realise my pushing for a response was actually why I wasn't getting one or if I did it was always just enough to shut me up!

***Sharon Bradbrook-Armit - RDI® Parent***

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