

Essential Eight Skills: Making a Request

Why is making a request important?

One of the earliest reasons to communicate is to ask for what we want or need. In the early stages, the parent/carer tries to understand as best they can. As children grow up they are able to point, or guide us to what they want, before developing key words and eventually sentences. With age, requesting becomes more complex, maybe using language to request help, a break, attention or explanation. This process takes a few years to develop and it will be different for young people on the Autism Spectrum or those with a learning disability.

For many of the young people we work with, the development of requesting does not come as naturally. Some children in the early stages of development may need support to firstly understand that 'asking' involves two people. They may also struggle with communication due to learning needs and communication needs (e.g., they may not have any speech). They may then need extra support to make consistent and reliable requests. This will hopefully help to reduce frustration and improve their wellbeing.

What does it look like in daily life?

- Requesting a favourite toy or activity
- Requesting to go to the toilet or having continence pads changed
- Requesting food or drink

Essential Eight Skills:

1. Making a request
2. Waiting
3. Accepting removals/transitions/sharing/turn taking
4. Completing tasks when requested
5. Accepting 'no'
6. Following directions related to health & safety
7. Completing daily living skills related to health & safety
8. Tolerating situations related to health & safety

Armstrong, H., Denne, L. D., & Bailey, T. (2021). The role of key skills as a risk marker for the development of challenging behaviour in children and young people who have an intellectual disability. *International Journal of Positive Behavioural Support*, 11(2), 3-14.



How to help your child understand how to make consistent requests

- Understand how your child requests. They will be trying in some way! Do they reach, point, look, make specific noises, bring you objects?
- Respond to these attempts to request. Name the item they ask for as you give it to them.
- Have objects available around the house that they could use to request, e.g. empty drink bottles, remote (TV), plate, shoes, nappy, towel, teddies.
- Use everyday routines and play to develop the ability to request and ensure you have their attention, e.g., in play, sit face to face. When the first part is finished, wait a little bit longer before you start a game or song again. Wait to see if they look, reach, tug or point to ask for the game again.
- Give choices – encourage your child to ‘choose’ what they eat or play with. Give them a choice of two items to begin with. You can gradually increase your choices as they get better at choosing the item they want. You can start to use some photos or symbols to help them choose.

How to support learning

- Keep language simple
- Use key phrases highlighting what they are doing well ‘good asking’
- Have an animated face and voice and respond positively to attempts to request.
- Increase the opportunities to request by moving things to somewhere new, putting food/drink/toys out of reach, waiting a bit longer before you give them something. They may ask again!

Please visit our website for videos explaining in more detail how to practise these and other essential skills

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