

Welcome to module four, getting started with communication. Wow, this is my favorite module, if I had to pick one. We are going to talk all about these specific foundational strategies that we've been discussing and I'm going to give you a lot of examples about how you can start using these strategies today to help your child start communicating.

Our objectives, this module's a little different in the fact that it is broken up into four different parts. These objectives are what I want you to learn across these four different parts. You're going to learn the foundational communication skills. That's a running theme through our toddler and preschool course. We're going to talk about joint attention, which is so important for social engagement and really helps our children start communicating. We're going to be able to state why it's important to start work on labeling preferred items. When we get to the portion where we talk about labeling, and that may not be appropriate for every student that we're working with or every child and that's okay if your student is not there yet, but we are going to talk about these foundational skills and these are the objectives that we are going to accomplish, but this module is chock full of amazing information. This is how we get at our students communicating today. It all happens here with this module.

Our goals, and this comes from the ASHA website, which is our organization as speech-language pathologists. Target work challenges of ASD and what to focus on, initiating spontaneous communication and functional activities. This is so vital for our students. When I'm working with my little ones who have autism, I make sure that what we're working on is functional. I am not going to, and I repeat, I am not going to make a child sit at a table for the entire therapy session or any part of the session, really. Some students may eventually do an activity at the table and that's fine, but that is not how therapy is planned for our toddlers and preschool age students. We want to make sure that we're embedding communication in functional activities. You'll have such a great idea about what that means as you go through the course.

I really love that too, as having my own private practice and being able to see some students either through telehealth or in their home, I love being able to analyze those functional activities. That might mean for one student, going to the playground. For another student, that might be sitting and spending time with mom and his sister. It's going to be different for everybody, but how can we embed these opportunities in functional activities? Like play too. We're going to talk all about play. Engaging in reciprocal communication interactions, that back and forth exchange, which if your child is not yet verbalizing, that is okay because this joint attention where we're doing something shared, you don't have to be verbalizing. There's a lot of communication that happens and we don't have to be verbalizing yet. Then generalizing these skills across activities, environments, and communication partners. It goes back to that idea of family and how important it is that we're really knowing, okay, who is the child talking to and in what environments? That's all going to be very important for our student.

Building rapport. Building rapport with our students is very, very important. We know that we have to have a great relationship with our students. Our students are not going to want to hang out with us if we immediately bombard them with a bunch of questions and we overwhelm them. That is not the way to go about things. Where do we begin? We talk with parents before the first session, if possible. That's important. Talking about, well, how is your child communicating? What are you concerned about? What does your child love to do? Observe the student first, if you can. I like to do this. If I get a new student who is preschool age, I like to be able to observe first. If it's a student that I'm seeing in a preschool setting, I like to say, "Hey. You know what? This is the student's first day, or this is a student's first week. I'm going to start by going in and just observing and see how the student is at baseline, that idea of baseline."

Find out what the student loves and enjoys. That's going to be so very important. Do they go to one of the centers? Do they really love cars? Do they love to stack things up? What does your student love and enjoy? We need to know those things because that's going to be really important for us to embed those into our sessions as well. Be playful and fun with the student, upbeat. We don't want to demand language or participation. If I have a student and let's say that... I'm going to talk about this book in a little bit, but let's say that I have a Pete the Cat book, and the student picks it up and they're leafing through it and they're looking at it. I'm not going to say, "Oh, who is that? Do you know what he's wearing on his feet?" I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to demand language. I'm not going to demand participation.

We're just building rapport. Meaning I'm in a space, you are in a space. We're here together and this is going to be fun. Not demanding language. If they pick up this book, I may say, "Oh, Pete the Cat. I love Pete the Cat." I might start the song that goes along with this book. (singing. That is what I'm going to do. I'm talking and that's okay. It's not that you have to be silent, it's just that we're not going to ask a lot of questions. That's not how we build rapport with our students. I think that's hard at first because I think sometimes we think it has to be a language enriched moment, but it doesn't in that time. We don't have to ask a lot of questions to be engaged with our students.

Do this, not that. The speech therapist observes the student in the classroom. Awesome. Love that as a way to start/ the speech therapist brings in a farm and farm animals. Fun. We talk about that a lot. The speech therapist presents them to the student, but does not demand language. You may have the farm activity and you may have the different animals out, and then maybe have a couple more in your bag and you say, "Oh, I'm so excited for the farm today. I have the cow. I brought you the horse. Oh, here's the duck. Oh, he says quack, quack. I love playing with the farm. Look, there's a horse. I forgot him in my bag." You're going to just be talking like that. You will gauge your student. Is that too much language? Is it not enough? It's fine to narrate what you're doing, but we don't want to bombard our student with questions or demands.

Do this, not that. The speech therapist brings the student to the therapy room for the first session. The student is visibly upset. The SLP brings out a farm and farm animals. The speech therapist asks the student to request the animals and label them. We're not going to do that. If the student is upset, we're not going to do that. We're not going to do this in the building rapport phase. We're not going to make our student request cow. We're not going to make the fill in the blank when I say the cow says... We're not going to do those things okay. In that situation, we want to say, why is she bringing them to the room? Some students you can bring to a therapy room. That's completely fine. Why is the student upset? Maybe that's new for them to go to the therapy room. Maybe you should be pushing into the classroom.

These are a lot of different things to think about and absolutely applicable for the home environment too. When I come over to see a new client in their home setting, I'm going to bring a lot of fun things or things that I hope the child likes, but I'm not going to be demanding language. If I go over to the student's house and they seem a little nervous that I'm there, or they're not a hundred percent sure that they like me or the activities that I have, I'm going to just present them. I'm building a rapport with them. I'm building a relationship. I am letting them know, "Hey, I'm Ms. Rose. We're going to have fun together, and I just want to get to know you better and build a relationship with you and show you, hey, these are fun items. We have. I'm here to support you." We want to be thinking about that when we're working with our students.

If you're a parent and you're helping to observe and getting your child transitioned to therapy, these are things to look out for too. When your child is very young, you should absolutely be involved in the therapeutic process to the extent that you want to be. Do you want to be in the sessions? Do you want to know exactly what's going on in the sessions,

especially if your child's not yet communicating, it's really important for you to be there to see how the clinician is working with your child. You want to make sure that your child is having fun, that the information is functional and that they're working on these foundational skills. All right. Building rapport with our kids, so very important.

The next item that I want to talk about within this module is joint attention. Joint attention, what is joint attention? All those many moons ago, when my supervisor told me I was working with a difficult client, really the client wasn't difficult. It's just difficult for me to know how to help the client, really. The client would cry. The client was not engaged in the therapy that I had planned and I really didn't know how to help the student. It was my first year as a speech therapist and my supervisor said, "Just work on joint attention." I really didn't grasp what that meant. It wasn't really good feedback. There weren't courses like this and there weren't podcasts. I just really struggled and that's why I kind gave it 110% to learn all this information so you don't have to feel that way.

Joint attention involves shared attention between at least two people on an object or event with both people knowing they're attending to the same entity. It's shared and they're doing it to together on some level. It's really the absolute basis for increasing learner engagement, increasing the social reciprocity. And once you've work on this foundational skill, you can see such growth, such engagement, such duration of tasks that you might be presenting to the child. You really will see so many moments when this is absolutely something that's directly embedded in your sessions. Why is it important? There's a strong relationship between joint attention in both receptive and expressive language skills. We think of it as a foundational skill and something we need to directly work on, especially for our autistic students. It's an important skill to address for our younger students.

Sometimes when we talked about the assessment module, you might have a student... I know this happens a lot. You are trying to do a standardized test because maybe that's what's required of your environment that you work in. The student will not sit for the test. The student is not yet verbalizing or communicating. The student is engaging in, potentially, some problem behavior because they're just orienting their environment that way. Then you have to create goals potentially from there, your intervention plan. You may not set a specific goal for joint attention, but I hope that after this course, you feel really comfortable doing that and embedding it in your sessions.

Now I want to talk to you about how would we work on joint attention with some of the items that I've already talked about and then some new ones? This car and car track is a really great way to engage in a shared activity. I love to bring this car track and then I bring a couple different cars. I'm not going to be giving the child a car and taking it back, giving it to the child and taking it back. I'm not going to do that because we know that we don't want to take from our students. Be a giver, not a taker. What I love to do is I get my car out. I may have some other cars the student can use. Then I put my car down and I may say vroom, vroom, or I may say ... and then I put my car down. Then I have a car out to see if the child will pick up the car. Maybe you want to hand the car to the child. You could also do that.

Some students are working on accepting something from somebody else. You may have them just grab into the bag to pick something out. Some kids like that element of surprise if they can't see which car they're going to get, but it's this shared component. We have the track. We have cars. They go down. We pick them up. We do it again. It would be cool to get a baseline of this joint attention. When I first presented this task to the student, he didn't like it. When I brought it the next time, we did it for 30 seconds and that was the baseline. You don't have to do the same activity over and over again for joint attention, but you want to revisit them and see how the child is doing with them. Those are some ideas for the car and car toy. This is a toy that you need to have in your therapy bag for preschoolers, a shape order. [inaudible]

00:15:00] can request different shapes that they want. Following one-step directions, put in star. Labeling, triangle, square. Shape sorter is great to have in your preschool therapy bag.

All right. TikTok, it's the platform of the moment. I do like to make TikToks over there all about preschool therapy and other communication-based items, but I love the shape sort because it's so funny. I actually found this, I think in my basement and my kids hadn't played with it in a long time. I brought it over for therapy because I like to have a variety of items that I bring and recently, and my child loved it. I thought, gosh, this is such a fun toy. I believe this is another Fisher-Price toy, shape sorter. It's a really, really cool, really cool toy.

I've had kids were talking and really love to request some of the different shapes. We would just have the shapes sitting out and we would take turns putting in different shapes. The child can label the shapes if they're working on labeling or if that's something that's already something that they're able to do. It's a super fun activity. Sometimes if the child is very new to shape sorting, I may just pick up the shape and say, "Circle. Oh, Ms. Rose found a circle." Then I may hand it to the child and gesturely point to the circle on the shape sorter because shape order, too, can be extremely frustrating if they're are new concept to the child. You don't want it to be something that's overwhelming. You don't want it to be something that's difficult. If it's new for your child, you might even just show them how you put it in. Oh, circle. I put in a circle. Star. Okay, here's a star. Crescent. Do you want to try the crescent and see if the child will put it in too. Super, super fun activity that you probably have laying around.

Mini objects. I love, love, love mini objects. This is my friend, Rachelle, from Speech Tree Company. She has some really great mini objects. We've become friends just on Instagram. I've done a couple collaborations together, but when I was putting together this course, I said, "Oh, my gosh. Can you please send me a picture of your mini objects?" She sells these. I love putting these together and using these with my clients. It's just something so simple as having... For every client, it's going to be different, but I have just a little Solo cup. I actually have it right here. Let me grab it. I have my therapy bag down there. What I do with the mini objects for my clients that I'm working with currently in my private practice is I will just have the mini objects in this little cup. I might shake it and say, "Oh, Ms. Rose brought you some presents today." I might shake, shake, shake. Then the child likes to put his hand in there and pick one out, or I might have a bigger bag of them and I may put a couple in here and let them choose.

It's really fun because you can purchase these, I think by thematic units and things like that, but if you look at these little things, there's so many fun... There's dinosaurs. There's a little mini mouse. It gives you the ice cream, the ball. There's so many things and it's as easy as a Solo cup and having some of these mini objects. I'm sure that they sell them locally, potentially at the dollar store, Target. She has them too. They're just really, really cute. It's something fun. It's that element of surprise. When I'm working with mini objects and something as simplistic as a Solo cup to have that element of surprise like, what's in there? It's fun. It's easy. It's something that I've used to work on joint attention with my students and I really, really love it. It's super fun for students and it can lead itself to so much different language and vocabulary because there's so much variety when you purchase these mini objects, so [inaudible 00:19:04]. If you haven't used those in therapy, a lot of fun.

While looking at a book. Every child is going to be into different books. We've talked a lot in this course about how to embed literacy, really, really important. I'm going to give you those different downloads for Brown Bear, Brown Bear and Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, which are some of my go-to favorite books. I also really love Pete the Cat. If you've not heard of Pete the Cat, this is an amazing book. Now, he has a lot of different books, but I really love this one for my early learners and why is it's just kind of like Brown Bear. It has this repetitive line.

Pete has these shoes and he starts singing this song. He starts singing about how much he loves his white shoes and it's repetitive. (singing). Then what happens? Pete stepped in a large pile of strawberries. Then it says, "What color did his shoes turn?" You turn the page and now they're red. It goes through this whole thing. It has this repetitive line with the word no, which is fun because that's an early learner word that's fun for kids to say. Then it goes on and then you sing I love my red shoes. It's repetitive. It's familiar. There's a routine. It's super fun and it's a nice way to work on joint attention. I love, love, love this book. You don't have to use this book, but that's just an example of how you could use the book with your child. Depending on what their language level is at, sometimes I'll have my kids point to items in the book, verbal approximations of some of the words. Shoe, you could sign shoe. You could use it on your AAC device, however your child is communicating. It's an amazing way to work on joint attention.

I always model for the parents and the team. I talk about this idea of joint attention. Why is it so important? Why do we need to work on this? Why should our time in therapy or our time with our own kids be spent working on joint attention? I talk about that. I model it in the sessions. I do the activity with the children and then I say, "See, this is an ample of joint attention." Then I talk with parents and coach them about how they can embed these types of activities into their daily routines so the child is getting that practice with them.

Oh, my goodness. One of my favorite things to talk about joint attention is so important in so many different ways that you can do it, with play, with turn taking, with the mini object, shape sorter, the books, you name it, it can be a joint attention activity. You just got to put on your little detective hat. That's another fun way. If you have a question about that, don't hesitate to contact me in the Facebook group. Like, Hey rose, I tried this. Is this joint attention? Were we doing it right? If it's tied to the course, I'd love to help you out. I'm going to give you a really great printable for this whole module, which we're going to talk about a lot of things in module four. Remember, it's broken into four chunks. This is a lesson planning guide. It goes over each foundational skill that we discuss and then examples of how you could work on these things with your children. See you for part two. We are going to discuss manding or requesting and imitation skills. See you then.