

Balancing Comments with Questions



This resource was produced by Indigo therapists with funding received from Telethon 2021

Communication is not a test, but it can certainly feel like it when being asked a string of questions.

It really feels like a test if the person asking the questions already knows the answer.

Individuals with complex communication needs are often the recipients of a higher proportion of questions within their daily interactions.

The effect of questions

When asked lots of questions, the following can start to occur:

- *Reduced motivation to communicate*
 - *Stops being a conversation and turns into a test*
 - *Limit the opportunities for initiation*
 - *Limits the types of language functions an individual can demonstrate*
 - *Create passive communicators*
 - *Lots of pressure to respond*
 - *Focus on compliance rather than connection*
 - *The question asker controls the topic and the conversation*
 - *Introduces the potential for a right or wrong answer (increases pressure)*
 - *Increases immediate echolalia with reduced demonstrations of comprehension*
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The effect of increasing commenting

When communication partners start to incorporate more comments into their interactions, the following starts to happen:

- *Communication partners tune in better to the individual's interests*
 - *Increases demonstrations of initiation*
 - *Reduces pressure to respond*
 - *Provides opportunities to express a range of communication functions*
 - *The topic is not fixed and can be flexible*
 - *No right or wrong answers*
 - *Encourages delayed echolalia with improved comprehension and functionality*
 - *Provides individuals direct examples that they can use or modify in the future*
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Alternatives to questions

Create motivating opportunities

Create situations where someone might want to communicate.

Do things that are worth talking about.

Create times in those activities to talk about what is happening.

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Expand on the original message

Add extra information.

Say something similar with slightly advanced grammar.

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- *"Go shop" > "Yes we went to the shop"*
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Use a soft probe

Offer a hint that a communication opportunity exists,

- *“I’d love to hear what you think.”*
 - *“I wonder what we could play now.”*
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This doesn’t require someone take the opportunity.

Narrate your own feelings or actions

Talk about what is seen, heard, felt:

- *Instead of: “What is this?”*
 - *You could say: “What a noisy train!” or “I don’t like that!”*
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Motivating
Opportunities



Expand

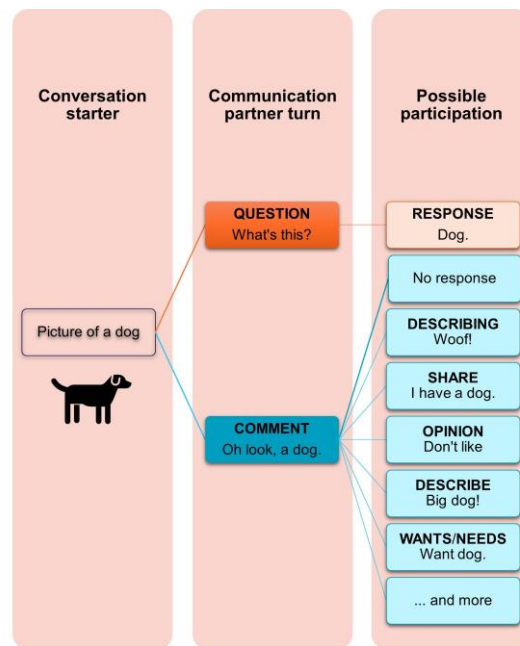


Soft Probe



Narrate

Questions vs Comments



Plan to use fewer questions

The goal

To include fewer questions and more comments/statements when communicating with individuals with complex communication needs.

The goal is not to stop using questions at all, just less.

Use Video

At first, it is difficult to realise how many questions we ask.

It is recommended that a short video is take of an interaction with an individual with complex communication needs (with their consent) and the communication partner makes a tally of how many questions are asked during that 5-minute period.

Repeat this at regular (weekly) intervals while this is a focus.

It can help to get a colleague to help with the tally.



Communication partner		Activity		Date
Comment	Yes/no Question	Closed Question	Open Question	
<i>Usually have a neutral or downward inflection</i>	<i>Can be answered with a yes/no response</i>	<i>Can be answered with short, factual answers</i>	<i>Can be answered with longer responses</i>	
Total Comments:	Total Questions:			
_____	_____			

For more information

For more information visit our website: *Telethon: Country Kids Communicate (indigosolutions.org.au)*¹

*Download this as a PDF document: Balancing Comments with Questions*²

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References

Stiegler, L. N. (2015). Examining the echolalia literature: Where do speech-language pathologists stand? *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 24, 750-762

¹<https://www.indigosolutions.org.au/our-services/services-for-schools/telethon-country-kids-communicate>

²https://www.indigosolutions.org.au/docs/default-source/telethon-resource-sheets/10_balancingcommentsandquestions.pdf

³<mailto:help@indigosolution.org.au>