

# Conversation with...

We had a chat with Marie Sowter, Speech, and Language Therapist from the Great North Children's Hospital. Marie works as part of a multidisciplinary team for the Pre-school autism diagnostic service. We asked Marie some questions in relation to the communication needs of autistic children.



## **What is the most common question you are asked by parents of autistic children?**

"The most common question I get asked is 'When will my child talk?' This is a difficult question to answer as every child is different and there are many factors that can affect development."

## **Are there some children that will never use verbal communication?**

"Lots of autistic children take longer than their peers to start saying words and phrases and there are some autistic children who do not use verbal language to communicate. We need to make sure these children have a way to communicate their needs and feelings."



**What would you say is a good tool to develop communication?**

"People are the best tool to support a child's communication. I would suggest playing games that require more than one person. Good examples would be wind-up toys, tickles and hide and seek."

**How can parents help support the development of communication?**

"Being a 'play partner' with your child is a good way to support them. Try to notice what your child likes doing and join them in their play. Take the focus off asking them questions or directing them, and instead comment on what they are doing. Keeping your language simple and matched to your child's level is crucial. Children can tune out if they hear adults talking in long sentences. Also try and limit the amount of time spent on screens."

