

What is Echolalia?

Echolalia is the term used to describe the repetition or echoing of sounds, words and phrases that a person has heard. It is a typical stage of early childhood language development.

Most children move on from this stage between one and two years of age. However, for some autistic people they may continue to use echolalia throughout their lifetime. Often the person repeating what they have heard, will do so with exactly the rhythm, tone and pitch that it was originally spoken in.

There are two main types of echolalia, and they both serve a purpose for the individual.

- **Immediate repetition:** Repetition that happens immediately after the word or phrase is heard. For example:
 - Adult: "Would you like a biscuit?"
 - Child: "biscuit"
- **Delayed repetition:** repetition that happens hours, days, weeks or even months after it was originally heard. For example quoting a film, or cartoon.

What is the purpose of echolalia?

Echolalia may be present for different reasons. For some people it may simply be a form of "stimming" and self-regulatory behaviour, but for others may be a way of buying time to find an appropriate response to a question, or statement.

The function of echolalia may be:

- trying to develop an understanding of spoken communication
- trying to process what is being asked or said, and to find the appropriate response, to "buy time"
- an attempt to join in a conversation
- self-stimulation
- comfort
- an attempt to process memories from a particular day as triggered by one of the senses

How to support someone with echolalia:

Where possible seek advice from a Speech and Language specialist as they will be able to direct you, but there are some ideas you could try.

The way you support someone with echolalia will depend on how they use it and the purpose it serves. It is important that you first check whether there is understanding of the words or phrases they are saying. If they do not understand, try building that up first. To do this you could:

- use flash cards
- play match up games



It is important to reinforce everything they do or say, for example if they are playing with a car say "Jonny is playing with the car" or "this is a car" pointing to it or holding it up to them.

Echolalia with response to questions:

If they are echoing part of a question, first check they understand the meaning of the question, for example do they understand what "what" means? Give them enough time to respond and if they still don't respond and you want to repeat the question, repeat it in exactly the same way. Remember they could be "buying time" in order to find the suitable answer.

To support someone with use of echolalia in response to questions:

- If the child responds to a question using echolalia, consider the way you structure the question. For example:
You: "Would you like a biscuit?"
Them: "Would you like a biscuit?"
You: "I want biscuit"
- Teach the person to use the response "I don't know."
- Use visuals to back up the question and choices available. For example "would you like juice" and show them the picture or visual for juice.
- Where possible start by responding for them, then encouraging them to repeat until they do it without any prompting from you. For example: "What's this? Car."

