

# Confidence Boost, Finding the Words

*Denise M Barrera, MPH*

Children with developmental disabilities are oftentimes overly consumed with fitting in and making friends between the ages of 6 and 16. The ability that they possess to join in with peers may be compromised by their lack of social fluidity. Self-esteem can become taxed and other complications may result such as depression, anxiety and potential academic difficulties.

As a parent of a child with high functioning Autism, it hurts to witness your child being rejected by others whether it be at a public park, birthday party, or at a school social function. The mamma bear wants to jump out and save your child from these children who simply do not understand how it feels to be in his/her skin. Of course, as parents, we cannot always come to the rescue as our children cannot live in a bubble. What we can do to help is prepare our children and give them the social words that they need to be successful in group interactions.

Socioemotional communication is stressful for children and adolescents. By dedicating some time to think about the best practices in aiding your child in unlearned communication skills will encourage more fluid interactions with peers. Role play works well with younger children. You can use manipulatives used during play time to promote the participation of your child. They will feel you are playing with them and you can get in some valuable rapport with them at that time. Try to use this time to focus on teaching them to join in with others while they are at play. Have them role play with you and pretend like you are with a group of children and they want to join you. Give the child the words that they should say when they approach the group. Express to your child that the group may not be playing something that he/she is interested in, however, explain to your child that they may have to play something they do not like at first. It is important that the child not approach the group and impose his/her demands for play as this will alienate the group. This is an extremely difficult concept for some children with developmental disabilities to understand and is oftentimes a source of isolation.

Helping your child to build a toolbox with social story starters, words of introduction, and words to use when joining other peers in play is a useful means for them to feel the confidence needed to join in with others.