



# Family Communication Intervention for Autistic Spectrum Disorder Children's Independence

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**Abstract.** Communication is a fundamental for every human being to carry out social activities. Effective communication is two-way communication and feedback from the communicant, but this is rarely found in children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Barriers to communication skills will have an impact on the development and independence of ASD children in carrying out daily activities. The purpose of this study is to find out how effective family communication interventions are in improving the independence of ASD children. The urgency of this research lies in the need to address the challenges of communication skills experienced by ASD children, which often affect their independence and self-confidence. This research was conducted at the North Sumatera Autistic State Special School. In this study there are several informants, namely parents of students who are in elementary school. This research uses a qualitative approach to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject and described in the form of words and language. Primary data was collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with parents to obtain maximum results. Secondary data were obtained from relevant documents and literature. The results showed that family communication interventions carried out by parents every day greatly influenced the increase in the independence of ASD children. This can be seen from the daily activities by ASD children, such as being able to tidy up their toys, eating and drinking themselves, following simple instructions, and understanding the daily activity schedule.

**Keywords:** Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Independence, Family Communication.

## 1 Introduction

The birth of a child is a gift that brings endless happiness to every family. However, challenges arise when there are physical, mental or psychological problems with the

child's growth and development. Children with special needs, such as those on the autistic spectrum, require tailored educational approaches (Abubakar et al., 2022; Morsa et al., 2022). Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) children are understood as children with complex neurobiological developmental disorders that affect their growth and development in everyday life. Such as the way children communicate, learn and interact with others. Decreased language and communication skills, social interaction and play, limited imagination, attention and interest characterize children with autistic spectrum disorder. In terms of behavior, children with autistic spectrum disorder show prominent behavior, which is very fond of repetitive behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

ASD children face various development challenges, including communication, social interaction, and adaptive behavior (Boldsen, 2021; Chien et al., 2023). These challenges often affect their independence, impacting their ability to perform daily activities independently. This situation makes parents feel lost, hopeless, and sad; some parents have mental health problems, depression and psychological anxiety (Amirbekova and Abdikerova, 2021). Parents with autistic children often experience three stages of emotional reactions, namely shock, disappointment, and finally acceptance (Mangunsong & Hartuti, 2009). Strong emotional support from the family, especially from parents, is key to helping children deal with social and psychological challenges.

The Mayo Clinic also states that children with autism may show delays in language and lack of interest in their surroundings. Other symptoms that can be observed include not responding when called by name, not pretending (pretend play), and having difficulty understanding other people's feelings (Klaas & Cook, 2024). Family communication interventions play a key role in shaping the independence of ASD children. Through daily interactions, parents and other family members can provide stable emotional support, which children with ASD need. Early education and intervention is critical for ASD children.

North Sumatera Autistic State Special School is an institution that provides special education and therapy to support children with ASD. Apart from studying in class, autistic spectrum disorder children are also carry out activities outside the classroom such as gymnastics activities which are held every Friday. However, not all children with autism spectrum disorder want to participate in gymnastics activities in an orderly manner. Some of them walked here and there chasing their friends, some just sat and there were also those who walked away while covering their ears. Apart from that, the North Sumatra State Special School for Autism also often involves its pupils and students in performance activities and competitions. The synergy that exists between students, teachers and parents produces an optimal process for the development and increasing independence of children with autistic spectrum disorder.

The urgency of this research is to develop an effective family communication model to improve the independence of ASD children. Through this research, it is hoped that families in Indonesia can adopt strategies to support their children's growth and development amidst the challenges faced. The urgency to produce this communication

model is driven by the need for a holistic and inclusive approach to educating and raising children with special needs, especially in the midst of increasing prevalence and the need for appropriate interventions.

## **2 Literature Review**

This study draws on research that aims to develop and analyze communication intervention strategies used within families to support the enhancement of ASD children's independence by exploring how interactions and communication within the family sphere can influence and facilitate the development of children's social and emotional skills at the North Sumatra Autistic State Special School. This research is important because independence is a critical aspect that affects the quality of life and social integration of ASD children in their ability to adapt in daily life.

First, Laurance (2020), entitled *Interpersonal Communication between Brother and Sibling with Special Needs (Case Study on Brother who has a sibling with Autism)*. Previous research focused on exploring interpersonal communication between siblings, focusing on the relationship between older siblings and younger siblings with special needs. While the author's title prioritizes the family communication model as a whole to increase children's self-confidence, this study is more specific in the brother-sister dynamic, ignoring the influence of parents or the broader family model.

Then, Parasian (2021), entitled *Communication of Parents of Children with Autism (Study of Parents of Children with Autism at Yayasan Biruku Indonesia)*. The previous research focused on parents' communication with their autistic children in the context of the foundation, including communication techniques and challenges. Although both titles specifically discuss communication in the family, the previous title is more directed at developing children's self-confidence through family communication models, while the author's research focuses more on parent-child interactions in general.

Furthermore, Sukmadie (2017), entitled *Family Communication between Parents and Siblings towards Autistic Siblings*. The study focused on exploring how communication in the family impacts the relationship between non-autistic children and their autistic siblings. While the author's research is more specifically focused on the interaction between non-autistic family members and autistic family members, while the main title seeks a communication model that supports the whole, including aspects of children's independence.

## **3 Method**

This study used a qualitative approach to explore an in-depth understanding of family communication interventions that play a role in developing independence in ASD children. This methodology allows researchers to explore the subjective reality of the

participants, understand the phenomenon from their perspective, and interpret the meanings that emerge from their social interactions. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation with parents of students at North Sumatera Autistic State Special School and through documentation of daily activities at school. Secondary data was obtained from literature relevant to the research topic.

The data collection techniques used included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted overtly and covertly to get an objective picture of daily interactions, while in-depth interviews were designed to deepen understanding of informants' subjective experiences. Documentation included photos and videos of ASD children's activities at school. This approach ensured that the data collected reflected the complexity of the experiences of families with ASD children.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles, Huberman and Saldana model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The collected data were interpreted contextually to find the main themes related to the family communication model and its influence on children's self-confidence. Data validity testing was conducted through triangulation techniques, which involved re-examining data obtained from various sources and methods to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings. This approach enabled the study to achieve a higher level of confidence in interpreting the phenomena studied.

## **4 Result and Discussion**

### **4.1 The Urgency of Increasing the Independence of ASD Children**

Increasing independence in children with ASD is an urgent need that has direct implications for their well-being and social adaptability. Children with ASD often face significant barriers in communication and social interaction, which can lead to social isolation and decreased quality of life (Lisak et al., 2022). The ability to be independent is a critical aspect of every child's development, especially for those on the autism spectrum. It is essential to ensure they can reach their full potential in an environment often not designed to meet their specific needs. From the interviews with several informants, there are several critical points regarding the urgency of increasing the independence of ASD children, namely communication and social interactions skills.

### **4.2 Family Communication Intervention in Improving the Independence in ASD Children**

The family communication model is important in developing independence in ASD children. In this regard, various communication strategies adopted by the family significantly help in supporting the growth and social adaption of ASD students.

Open and supportive communication from the family helps children feel safe to express themselves in an environment that accepts and understands their uniqueness. Adjustment in communication styles – whether verbal, non – verbal, or visual – allow children to understand better and be processed by the world around them (Safi et al.,

2023). This forms a solid foundation by which children learn to navigate their social interactions.

Applying positive communication through praise and recognition of children's efforts and achievements is also very important. This approach boosts children's self-confidence and motivates them to continue participating and striving in various activities. Meanwhile, the use of technology and communication aids such as tablet apps support ASD children in expanding their communication skills, opening up more opportunities for them to engage and learn (Kumm et al., 2022).

Parents who serve as models of positive behavior also greatly influence children. By demonstrating how to manage and respond constructively to situations, children learn through direct observation how to face challenges positively (Ren et al., 2020). In addition, a child-centered approach to communication and interaction at home helps them feel that they are an important part of the family, directly supporting self-confidence development. Based on the results of interviews with several informants, here are some communication models for increasing the independence of ASD children:

**Table 1.** Family Communication Model of SLBN Autis Sumatera Utara

Family Communication Model			Description
1.	Open and Communication	Supportive	The family encourages free expression from all members without fear of judgment, adjusting communication to accommodate the ASD child's expression. Focuses on praise and positive feedback to reinforce behavior by praising the child's efforts
2.	Adjustment of Communication Methods		Adjust communication methods to meet the communication needs of ASD children, including the use of clear verbal language accompanied by non-verbal
3.	Behavioral Models		Parents and family members serve as models of good behavior in communication and social interaction, providing examples that can be imitated by children
4.	Child-Centered Approach		Interactions are tailored based on the child's interest and needs by creating an environment that supports the development of communication and social skills

In the face of the unique challenges encountered by children with ASD, the family communication model plays a crucial role in shaping and strengthening their self-confidence and social adaptability. A family's open and supportive communication not only facilitates free and uninhibited expression from all family members, but also specifically tailors the communication approach to accommodate the unique needs of

the child with ASD. This approach allows the child to feel accepted and valued, which is vital in strengthening their self-confidence and social inclusion (Dissanayake et al., 2020).

Adaption in communication style is also one of the important pillars in supporting the development of children with ASD. By adjusting communication method-using clear body language, visual communication, and appropriate verbalization-families can significantly improve their child's understanding and response to the world around them (Cooper et al., 2023). These methods not only strengthen the connection between the child and the family, but also help in expanding the child's ability to interact outside the family environment, such as in school and society

The reconstruction of consistent routines and predictable structures is fundamental in helping ASD children feel safe and in control of their environment. This structure minimizes the anxiety that often arises in the face of uncertainty and change, which is very common for individuals with ASD. The reinforcement of these routines also supports the development of social and communication skills, providing the child with a stable framework to interact with the wider world and thus, significantly improving their social adaptability (Ayasrah et al., 2023).



**Fig 1.** HS can now hold a glass by himself

HS's mother explained that HS's development has progressed since attending the North Sumatra Autistic State Special School. HS can already take what we tell him to do. For example, I train his physical by asking "what do you want? Drink?". Take a cup. He takes the cup and gives it to me. As seen in Figure 1, HS can already hold a glass and drink by himself. HS can already put his own shoes on and can eat a little by himself using his hands even though they are still scattered. HS can't wear his own clothes yet and when he wants to go to the toilet he is still accompanied by his mother.

### 4.3 Discussion

The Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT) distinguishes two main dimensions in family communication: conformity and conversation (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). The conversation dimension, which emphasizes the free exchange of ideas and feelings, is particularly relevant in the context of children with ASD. Through open communication, children with ASD can learn to express themselves more freely and receive emotional support from their families, which directly strengthens their self-confidence.

Adopting a communication style that focuses on conversation within the family helps children with ASD feel heard and understood. This involves discussing feelings, ideas, and daily experiences in an open and supportive manner. In doing so, children learn that their views are valuable and that they have a voice in the family dynamic, which directly supports the development of self-confidence (Tumanggor et al., 2024).

At the State Special School for Autism in North Sumatera, the implementation of a communication model that combines both aspects of FCPT can be seen in the collaboration between teachers and parents. Teachers there are trained to expand and continue the communication model practiced at home, ensuring consistency that helps children transition between home and school, which is important for independence and social development.

The integration of FCPT theory into everyday practice at home and at school forms a solid foundation for increasing the independence of children with ASD. This approach not only facilitates the development of communicative and social skills, but also supports the formation of independence, which is essential for their future well-being and development.

## 5 Conclusion

This study shows that effective family communication interventions can significantly improve the independence of children with ASD. Through the application of open, supportive, and adaptive communication models, families can provide stable emotional support and a safe environment for children with ASD. Based on the findings of this study, family communication interventions conducted by parents can improve unidirectional communication, increased language production, imitation skills, so this situation can increase independence in children. This can be seen from the daily activities performed by ASD children, such as being able to tidy up their toys, eating and drinking by themselves, following simple instructions and understand the daily activity schedule. In addition, implementing appropriate communication technology can help ASD children express themselves better. Further research is also needed to develop and evaluate communication models that can be widely adopted so that more families and institutions can benefit from this approach in supporting children with ASD.

**Disclosure of Interests.** The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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