

## **www.autismhelp.info**

### **Interrupting, repetitive questions and talking too much**

#### **Points to note**

- A student with autism may ask questions repeatedly because it helps relieve anxiety. Questions about 'what will happen next' may be due to anxiety about the future; children with autism have difficulty anticipating what might happen next.
- The child might be reassured by hearing the same response to his question over and over. He may become distressed if the answer differs in any way from what he wants to hear or what he heard the first time.
- An articulate student may want to engage in conversation but lacks the necessary skills to do so. Questioning may be his only way of holding a conversation.
- A student who talks incessantly may miss the cues from others that it is inappropriate to continue with a conversation that is boring or repetitive. He may also interrupt conversations because he doesn't know how or when to join in.
- Repetitive questioning may be a result of mimicking the conversation of others – "What are you doing?" "What's that for?"
- The student may go on and on about a topic that he is passionate about. This is because he knows just what to say, however he doesn't understand that others may not be as fascinated as he is.

#### **What you can do**

- Be sensitive to the student's attempt at communication. Remind yourself that this questioning may be a means to remain calm. Questioning is often a phase children with autism experience before developing more meaningful communication.
- Some children love the repetition of asking and getting the same answer every time. Vary your answers, while still answering the question. For example, "When do we have Art?" answer "At 11 o'clock," "On Tuesday and Thursday," "After recess," "Before lunch" etc.
- Move the conversation on but still answer the question. For example, "You have Art at 11, you will be studying life drawing today – what do you like to draw?"
- Create a visual timetable for the student. If he knows what will happen each day, hopefully he won't need to keep asking. When he asks, point toward the time table rather than answering. There is a large range of printable images on an educational site called [www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com)
- List the times the student is allowed to ask repetitious questions on a timetable - you may need to place a limit on the number of times you will answer the same question. Make a clear rule – "You can ask that question three times only." After that, suggest more appropriate conversation, "We've finished talking about that now. Ask me about ...." Give the student a card with a list of alternative questions.

- Tell the student you will respond to his questions when he has completed his work. This may help to motivate him, especially if he is doing a task he does not enjoy.
- The student may need help learning when it is appropriate to join a conversation, ie. when there is a pause or gap. He may need to be taught specific phrases such as “Excuse me.”
- Use role play scenarios to practice conversational skills, such as how to pay attention and appear interested, without asking questions, ie. by making positive comments, eye contact, nodding.
- Model and practise commenting rather than questioning. For example, ‘You’re drawing a ...’ instead of ‘What are you drawing?’