

The Importance of expanding your family communication bandwidth. By Amy Cameron

The following article was written by Consultant, [Amy Cameron](#).

Communication is more than talking. It's more than words, just as a song is more than the lyrics. Thoughtful, reciprocal communication is essential for developing flexible minds. Through communication, people share experiences, thoughts and ideas. Thoughtful reciprocal communication enables people to pass ideas through others, gain different perspectives, and expand upon what is known beyond solitary experience. It impacts a person's ability to self-monitor and to develop a self-identity. Thoughtful, reciprocal communication impacts the person's ability to think, remember, and relate to others. It directly impacts initiative and motivation to interact. It is essential for survival in the dynamic world that requires interaction with other people. People with Autism can be thoughtful and reciprocal communicators. It is an essential component of the RDI® Program. In the RDI® Program, parents learn how to modify their communication to provide the child many opportunities to develop thoughtful and reciprocal communication.

Brain Bandwidth

Dr Gutstein describes the development of communication using the analogy of "bandwidth". Typically babies spend the first two years of their lives broadening their communication bandwidth. During this period of time, children do not do a lot of talking, but they do communicate. Talking, or language development, becomes a major enhancement to communication after they have mastered the other aspects of communication. Prior to learning to speak, children usually are masters of using gestures, facial expressions, body language, communicative intent, and vocal elements like intonation, timing, emphasis, pacing (otherwise known as prosody) to communicate their intentions. They normally have a good understanding of contextual processing (ex. It is ok to hug Grandma, but not ok to hug a stranger), ability to pull upon previous experiences and integrate to predict the future, and the ability to integrate and thrive in dynamic situations. All of this requires general activation of many different neural processing centres so that they are potentially available depending on what is needed. Like a wide area network that the person can use as needed.

On the other hand, many people with Autism learn to talk without many of these elements in place. Speech without the other elements of communication requires only limited activity of brain centres, or a very "narrow bandwidth". By re-enforcing narrow bandwidth (talking without communication) the brain centres become more specialized and tightly linked to specific stimuli in the environment. Using a narrow bandwidth is faster, but not better. Increasing brain bandwidth slows down response times because it requires a lot of brain energy.

Broadening Neurological Bandwidth

Broadening neurological bandwidth is an essential element in the RDI® Program and parents are the key. They are the ones with the ability to provide their child with numerous opportunities for simple shared experiences. Through these experiences, parents can help their child develop awareness and thought prior to speaking. They can expose their child to the many rich functions that language serves, and limit narrowband, or means-to-end communication (questions, commands and prompts).

Parents can encourage broadband brain activation and thoughtful, reciprocal communication by:

- Providing many simple shared experiences with the child
- Limiting the amount of verbal language directed at the child
- Slow the rate of communication
- Increase and amplify the use of gestures, facial expressions, pausing, body language, positioning, and states of physical tension
- Increase and amplify use of vocal prosody (emphasis, intonation, pacing, timing, volume changes)
- Limit questions, commands and prompts to 20% of what is said to the child
- Offer opportunity, but do not demand or elicit response from the child
- Increase the child's exposure to the many rich forms of experience sharing communication (declarative communication)
- Be patient, it takes time to widen bandwidth and develop meaningful communication

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