

Non-verbal Autism

Introduction

To begin this poster, there are many variants of autism children and adults can experience. This poster will be researching a deeper understanding of non-verbal autism. Research has shown a defined meaning of non-verbal autism is when the individual is unable to communicate through speaking this can be a temporary fixture or a long-term fixture (National Autistic Society, 2026). This poster will explore a deeper understanding of non-verbal autism and the strategies and barriers that practitioners use to ensure all the children have the best outcome. According to Holland, (2019) “25-30%” of children with autism are unable to communicate through speech.



(Tes, 2024)



(Bell, 2016)

Barrier

In a mainstream school there are teachers and teacher assistants that have been trained in different areas to support the children in their care. However, a nonverbal child is often unable to be pushed to their full potential, as staff are unable to have training. Teaching staff in England have expressed their concerns and explained their classes are too large to support all the children and they are putting those children with additional learning needs at risk (The Guardian, 2026). This links to the UNCRC, as article 3 states all settings should prioritise the children's best interests (UNICEF UK, 2019). Another article also agrees with this and explains a huge problem children with additional learning needs face is their care givers unable to use their additional communication needs as they are not trained on how to use them adequately. This source also states “only 4%” of staff members feel confident that they have had a significant amount of training (Lawler, 2017). This barrier is known as a social model. This source compares the medical and social models. The medical model focuses on the children's ability and focuses on difficulties the children may face. However, the social model considers environmental barriers that could affect children (Social Work News, 2024). Another barrier is nonverbal children are unable to speak this is classed as a medical model. This is a barrier because nonverbal children often find it difficult to express their opinion and reasoning, which can lead the children to feel isolated and not powerful enough (Learn Together Cambridgeshire, 2015). An article explains parents of nonverbal children have been interviewed and expressed their devastation when they realised their child was not making as many friends as they were, unable to communicate with them. This can lead the children to struggle more in social situations and increase negative behaviour (Sturrock et al., 2023). Adding to this, there is a source that also agrees with this, as they state nonverbal children might struggle more communicating and understanding other feelings, which can relate to them struggling to create bonds with their peers (Williams, 2024).

Diagnoses and Identification

To begin with, often parents or practitioners notice common signs of autism, these signs will be discussed in another section. If there are concerns about a child, it is important the adult follows through with the concerns and reports them to the GP or health professional or seeks support from additional learning needs support in the setting (NHS, 2022). Having a diagnosis can support your family, as throughout the assessment parents will be asked about their child's developmental stage, and children will be asked to complete activities. Using the results of this will provide parents with strategies to encourage children's development and provide support for problems the family is facing, for example, social, behavioural and sensory needs (NHS, 2020). In addition to this, it is important to observe signs and symptoms, as the children are more likely to be provided more support and have a better experience in schools (UNICEF, 2025). Some of these signs may be social interaction, communication delay and a cognitive development delay these and many more signs will be found more noticeable in some children, and it is important you follow the correct steps (UNICEF, 2025). Many parents and careers often identify a difference in their children's communication and milestones, for example, being unable to respond to their name at a particular age or requesting objects using hand gestures. “40%” of children diagnosed with autism are found to be nonverbal (Paul, 2022). This source states the assessment for autism is based on observation to assess the child's holistic development and see the areas the child is struggling in (Zheng et al., 2022).

Strategies

Throughout this section a strategy will be discussed to provide support for nonverbal children. The strategy that will be explored is an open area with natural colours. According to Kit for kids, (2025), having childcare settings with a plain and open space provides the children with a calming area where they can learn and develop. However, this source agrees with this, as they explain vibrant colours can provide children with discomfort and overstimulation, which can be harder for nonverbal children as they are unable to communicate their feelings (Ming En et al., 2026). This source challenges their own viewpoint, as they also state a learning area should be natural and calm however, the lights should not be harsh and directly facing the children. The lights should also not be dim, because the children may have difficulty seeing items, which can affect their eyesight. (Ming En et al., 2026). This strategy supports the Montessori approach. Montessori observes children with autism to ensure they are having the best care (Domenico, 2025).

Conclusion

This brings the academic poster to an end. This poster has examined research to identify barriers nonverbal children face daily, for example, unexperienced support workers and inability to express their views. The poster then explored a strategy to enhance nonverbal children's learning and development while being in childcare settings, while investigating an autism diagnosis for children and what parents and carers can expect.