

## Introduction

Speech-language pathologists and special education teachers are responsible for teaching many specific skills to children with language disorders. One of the most important language skills young communicators must learn is to answer and ask questions. Teaching this skill can be a challenge, especially when a child doesn't comprehend what questions are and how to respond to them. People are constantly asking children questions for a variety of purposes, such as the following:

- to obtain information (What do you have? What are you doing?)
- to gain attention (Where did that ball go?)
- to take turns in a conversation (Who else did you see at school today?)
- to teach vocabulary (What is this?)
- to obtain an explanation (How did you do that? Why are you crying?)

Children hear these types of questions repeatedly throughout the day, but if they don't comprehend the question form, they may not respond accurately or at all.

This photo project began out of necessity for one specific four-year-old boy with a diagnosis of autism. He was unable to answer many *wh-* questions; he was easily distracted by competing stimuli; and he learned best through multiple, repeated examples. He loved children's pictures in books as well as a photo album of a recent trip to Italy. He could answer some simple *What is it?* questions, but he frequently did not attend to or respond to other questions.

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When I searched for appropriate materials to teach this child to answer basic *wh*- questions, what I found was either too high level, had cartoon drawings with too much visual information, was too small to grasp and maintain a child's attention, or the content wasn't meaningful to a young child. Using a digital camera and child models, I created simple photos of children (including the boy himself) holding objects or performing actions. I removed all background and unnecessary information from each picture to reduce distracters, leaving only the child and the cue for answering the question in the photo.

When I presented the photos to the child, they were an immediate hit! The boy attended fully to each photo as it was interesting, meaningful, and simple. It also provided the necessary framework for discussion in order to answer the question. The strategy worked! The child quickly learned to consistently answer *what have* and *what doing* questions. He then learned to attend to and differentiate between those two *what* question forms when he was looking at a single photo. With the help of the photos, his comprehension of *who* and *where* questions quickly followed. Finally, I introduced him to *when*, *why*, and *how* question photos, and he successfully learned to answer all *wh*- question forms.

While these photos are a tool you can use to successfully teach early question answering and asking, they are only a single strategy. The process of learning to attend to, answer, and ask questions that are meaningful and relevant to the situation is long and involved. *Autism and PDD Photo Cards—Wh-Questions* is one useful strategy for beginning this process.

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