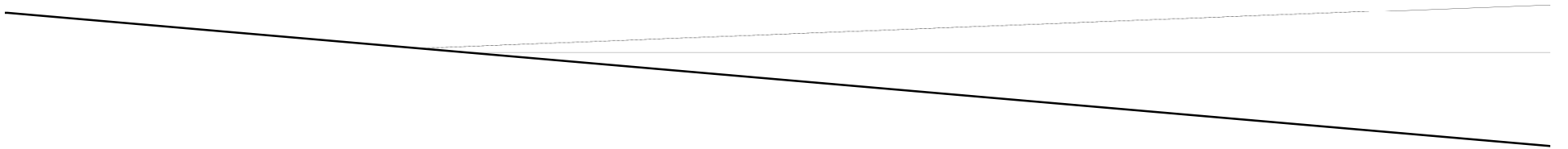


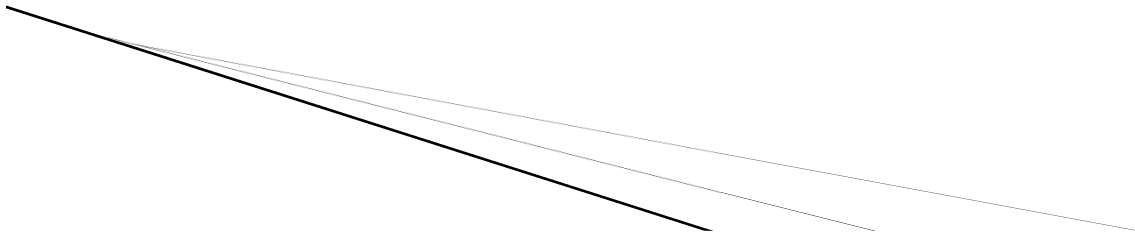
Speech Therapy for Echolalia

Carrie Clark, CCC-SLP
The Speech Therapy Solution



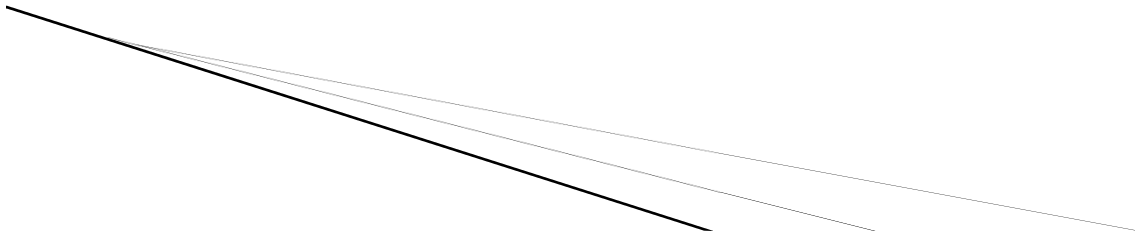
What is Echolalia?

- ▶ When a child repeats a word, phrase, or passage that has been spoken by someone else
- ▶ Can be immediate or delayed (more than 2 conversational turns after it was originally said)
- ▶ “Scripting” is another term used to describe delayed echolalia that is captured from a recording (like a TV show or movie)



Is Echolalia Normal?

- ▶ Echolalia, or repeating what is heard, is a very normal part of language development. Children that are learning to speak use this constantly. If I ask my 1-yr-old son if he wants a bath (one of his favorite activities), he will consistently say “baa” (he’s still working on final consonants). He doesn’t say “yes” yet, he just repeats the last word of the question. Children learn to use language by repeating what they hear around them. Then, as their language skills increase, they start making up their own utterances more and you see the use of echoing or repeating decline.
- ▶ However, some children don’t move past this echolalia stage. Some children will only repeat what others have said and very rarely come up with their own thoughts or sentences. Some children don’t speak at all unless it is a movie script or tv script that they have heard before. This type of echolalia is not part of typical development and could indicate that the child is having trouble learning to use language.



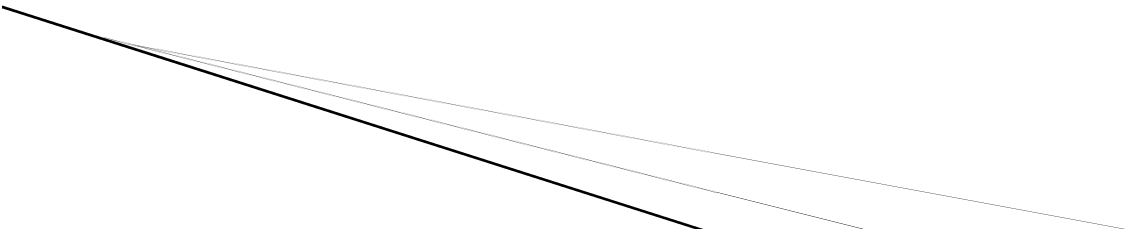
Echolalia in the Autism Spectrum

- Echolalia occurs often in children on the autism spectrum.
- Blanc (2012) proposes the following six stages of natural language acquisition for children on the autism spectrum
- Notice how children start with full sentences not single words like in typical development

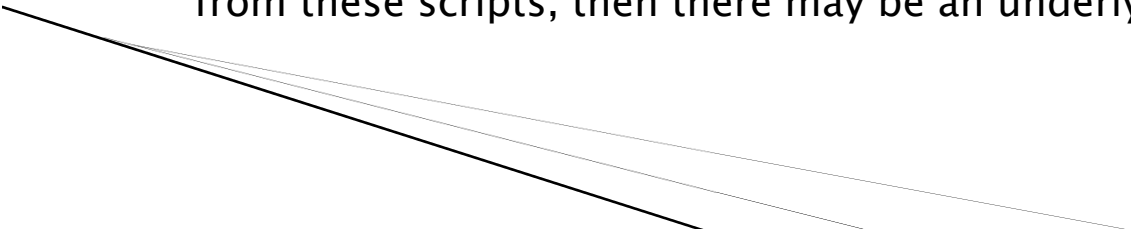
TABLE 3. The six stages of natural language acquisition.

Stage	Examples
1. Communicative use of whole language gestalts	"Let's get out of here." "Want some more?"
2 - A. Mitigation into chunks	(1) "Let's get" + "out of here"
2 - B. Recombining these chunks	(2) "Want" + "some more?" (1) "Let's get" + "some more?" (2) "Want" + "out of here"
3. Further mitigation: isolation of single words, recombination of words, and generation of original two-word phrases	"Get – more." "Want – out?"
4. Generation of first sentences	"I got more."
5. Generation of more complex sentences	"I wanna go out."
6. Generation of the most complex sentences	"I don't want any more, but you can have mine." "How long do you wanna play outside?" "Do I really have to go out to play today?" "How 'bout if you go out and play instead?"

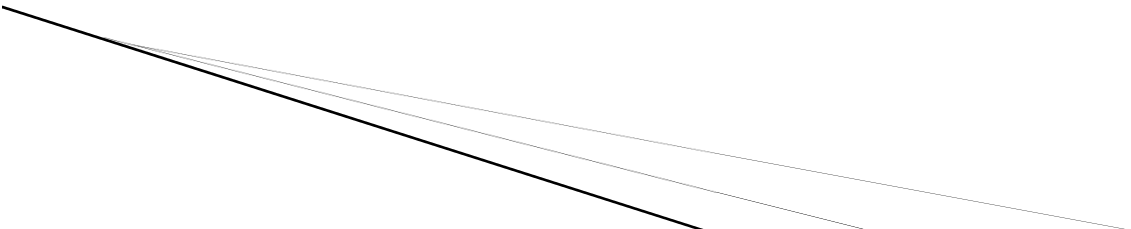
Does Echolalia ALWAYS Mean Autism?

- ▶ Nope!
 - ▶ Remember how we said all children use this when they are first learning language? Our children with severe language delays may also be using this as a normal part of language development, just later than we would expect it
 - ▶ A child using a lot of echolalia may just not have enough language to communicate to you another way.
- 

When Should Echolalia Fade?

- ▶ Children between the ages of 1–2 years should be echoing or imitating you a lot. That's how they are learning. However, by age two you should see them begin using their own utterances as well. You may see them continuing to imitate you or use echolalia when you ask a complex question or when you're giving directions but they should also be using a lot of their own utterances as well. A 2-year-old shouldn't be only using imitated speech to talk.
 - ▶ By three years of age, you should see pretty minimal echolalia. 3-year-olds should be creating their own simple sentences to communicate with the world around them. You may still see a little echolalia here and there but the child's speech should be predominantly their own thoughts.
 - ▶ Delayed echolalia (such as quoting movies or tv shows) is used by many children but relying on it too heavily can be a problem. You may hear movie lines or tv show quotes as your preschooler plays because he is acting out and rehearsing certain scenes that he liked. That's ok! However, if your preschooler seems to be stuck on one scene or quote and repeats it over and over again, there may be a problem.
 - ▶ Now, obviously there's nothing wrong with a kid getting SUPER excited about a certain new movie and focusing a lot of his conversations on it for a while, but it should fade as the novelty wears off. For example, there are a lot of little girls running around singing "Let it Go" from the movie Frozen right now but I wouldn't say they have a language problem. But if a child is always quoting or scripting something or if the child doesn't have much other language that he uses aside from these scripts, then there may be an underlying language problem.
- 
- A decorative graphic consisting of several thin, parallel lines of varying lengths and slight curves, extending from the bottom left towards the center of the page.

Possible Purposes of Echolalia

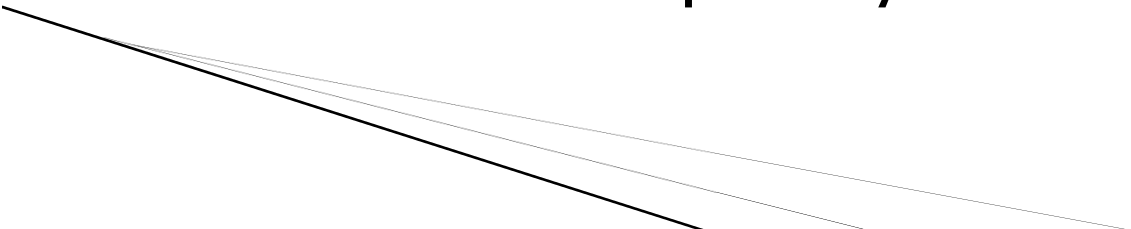
- ▶ Child has a limited vocabulary
 - ▶ Child is echoing to request something
 - ▶ Child doesn't know how to answer questions
 - ▶ Child thinks that your next line (like praise) is supposed to be part of the response
 - ▶ Echoing is self-stimulatory or habit
 - ▶ Child is learning language as gestalts (such as the 6 stages of language development for children on the autism spectrum)
- 

When Echolalia Comes from Limited Vocabulary

Cause: Some children may be using echolalia because they don't know enough words of their own to form sentences

How to Tell: Do formal testing on the child's vocabulary or collect a sample of known words from family/teachers.

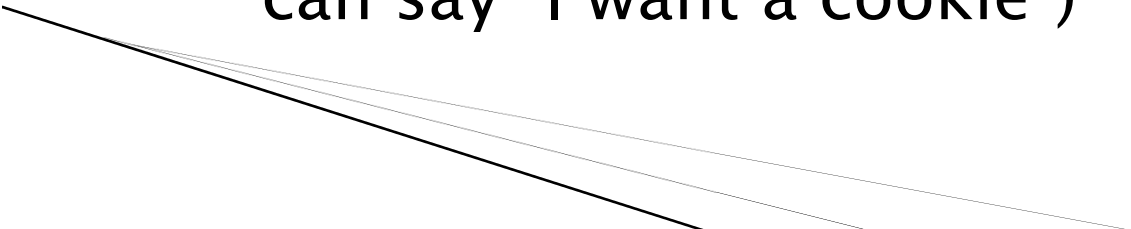
Treatment: Increase single-word vocabulary first receptively and then expressively



When Echolalia is Used to Request

Cause: The child does not know how to request appropriately, may be saying “do you want a cookie?” or just repeating the last word of a question (“cookie?”)

Treatment:

- ▶ Teach the child a carrier phrase that can be used for requesting, like “I want...”.
 - ▶ Model the correct use for the child each time (ex: child says “hold you” and you say “hold me”)
 - ▶ Respond to the original way the child said it (ex: child says “do you want a cookie?” and you say “no, I don’t want a cookie but you do. You can say “I want a cookie”)
- 
- Three thin, parallel lines slanting downwards from left to right, located at the bottom of the slide.

When Child Echoes Questions

Cause: The child does not know how to answer questions and so will repeat the last word of the question instead of responding

Treatment: Teach the child to answer specific question forms. This is the approach I use:

1. Choose one question type (like “do you want it?” or “what’s this?”) to address at first.
2. Ask the question and then immediately say the answer with a single word (without pausing). It sounds like this “Do you want it? Yes.” Ideally, the child will just imitate the “yes” part of it. If not, encourage the child to imitate “yes” (or whatever the answer is). Keep doing this until the child is consistently repeating just the one-word answer.
3. Ask the question again but now just say the first sound of the answer, like this: “Do you want it? Yyyy-“. Encourage the child to say the word “yes” by getting her started with the first sound. If you have to say the whole word with her a few times, that’s ok, but hold out the first sound until she starts it. Keep doing this until she is consistently saying the answer after you give her the first sound.
4. Ask the question again but now just mouth the first sound but don’t say it out loud. You should just look like you’re about to say it. Direct the child’s attention to your mouth by pointing so she sees you starting to say the sound. Encourage the child to say the word after you mouth the first sound. Keep doing this but gradually fade the amount that you’re mouthing the sound until she will just say the answer without you needing to mouth it at all.
5. Once she’s mastered one question form, start over again with a different question. Keep doing this until you’ve taught a variety of questions and she starts answering them spontaneously without using echolalia.

When Child Echoes your Praise

Cause: The child is so used to hearing a specific phrase after their response that they incorporate it into their respond (ex: You say “what does a puppy say” and child says “woof woof, good job, Kevin!”)

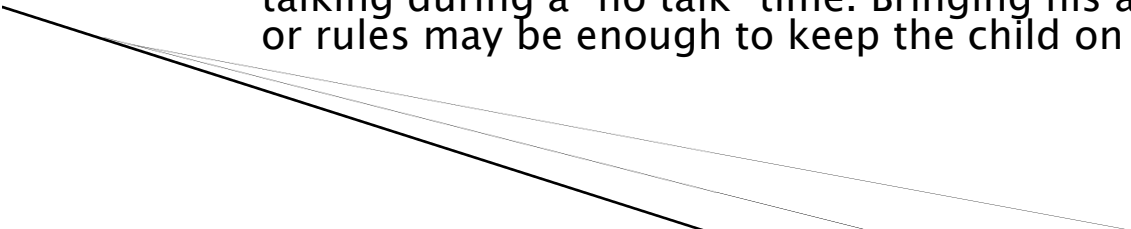
Treatment:

- ▶ Stop saying the expected response and instead just repeat the child’s answer and then pause and give feedback (ex: child says “woof woof, good job, Kevin” and you say “Woof woof <pause> a dog does say woof woof”)
- ▶ If that doesn’t fix the problem after several tries, then you can go back to the numbered steps on the previous slide and use the same type of cuing system. For example, you would say “What does a puppy say? Woof woof.” Then, try to jump in and say “woof woof” again after he says it but before he can go on to say “good job”. It may take a while for him to get used to not saying the whole thing so just keep trying this and eventually it should fade out.

When Echolalia is Self-Stimulatory/Habit

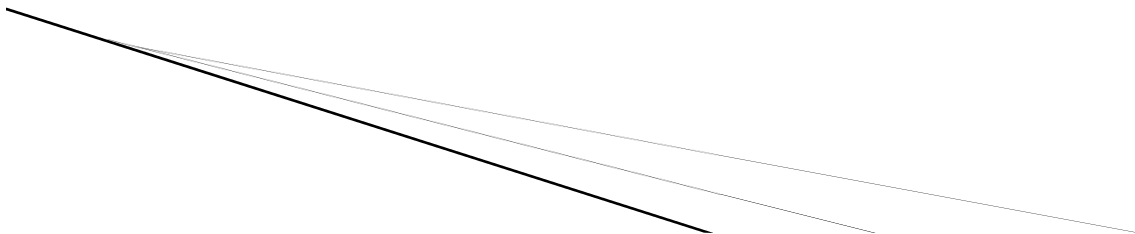
Cause: The child finds comfort in repeating familiar lines from something. This seems to soothe anxiety about unfamiliar situations. It also may occur because they are bored or tuned out so they retreat to their own world where their favorite movie is playing non-stop and they can tap into that and repeat the character's lines for entertainment.

Treatment:

- ▶ This is a pleasurable activity for the child so make sure he has a time to do that during the day.
 - ▶ If it is not an appropriate time to be doing this, figure out if it is from stress, anxiety, boredom, etc. and treat that cause
 - ▶ Stress/Anxiety: Read him a social story about what's going on around him or teaching him some calming strategies that will help him self-soothe in a quieter manner.
 - ▶ Boredom/Tuned Out:
 - Remind him to tune back in
 - Have an adult sitting next to him reminding him to focus on the teacher
 - Teacher frequently asks the child questions about what she is talking about to focus his attention back on her
 - Give the child a small fidget toy that will allow him to move his hands so he can focus on the teacher better
 - ▶ Habit: Teach the child rules about when it is ok to be talking and when it is not ok to talk. Then, have the teacher gently remind him of those rules when he is talking during a "no talk" time. Bringing his awareness to this and setting limits or rules may be enough to keep the child on track.
- 
- A decorative graphic consisting of several thin, parallel lines that originate from the left side of the page and extend towards the right, with varying slopes and lengths, creating a sense of movement or a stylized underline.

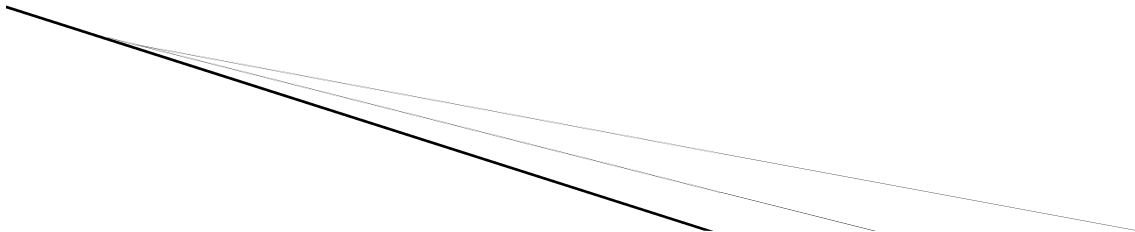
If the Child is Learning Language in Gestalts (Large Sentences/Units)

- ▶ Identify which of the 6 phrases the child is currently in:
 1. Communicative Use of Whole Language Gestalts
 2. Mitigation into Chunks and Recombining Chunks
 3. Further Mitigation by Isolating Words and Recombining into 2-word utterances
 4. Generation of First Sentences
 5. Generation of More Complex Sentences
 6. Generation of Most Complex Sentences



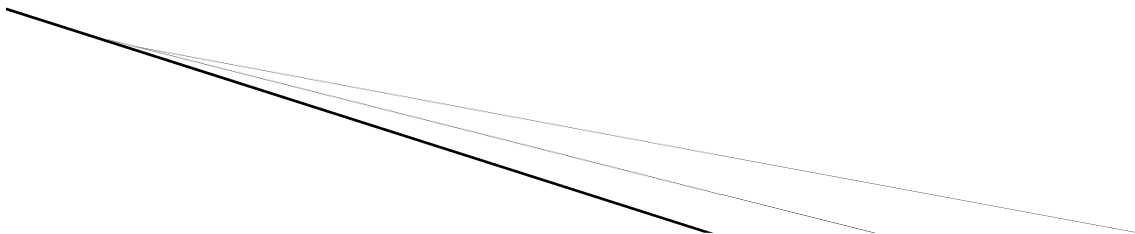
Gestalt Learning

- ▶ If the child is in the early stages, model more gestalts that will be easy for the child to use and can be easily divided into meaningful chunks later, like “Let’s go!” and “Time to eat”
- ▶ These should be individual for each child based on developmental level, current repertoire of gestalts, and what is still needed in the child’s vocabulary

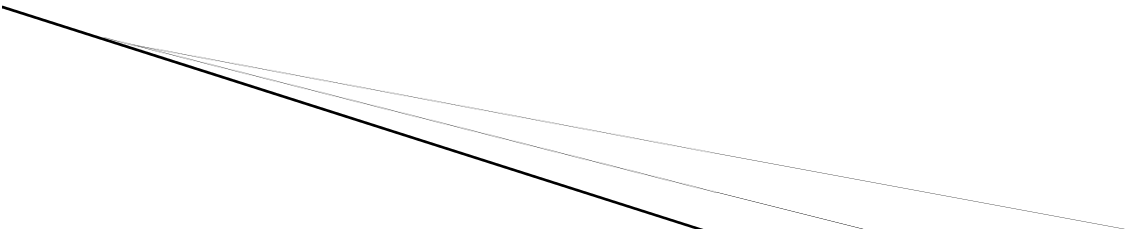


Gestalt Learning

- ▶ Once the child has several gestalts, start modeling how to break the current gestalts apart and recombine to make new phrases
- ▶ Continue modeling the next higher phase in that continuum

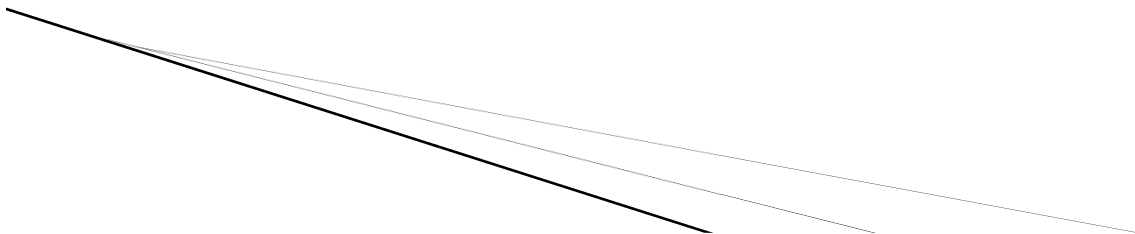


Helpful Tips for Parents / Teachers

- ▶ Don't ask a lot of questions or make direct prompts as these encourage echolalia. Try more indirect communication that allows the child to initiate (I wonder what you had for lunch today)
 - ▶ Avoid teaching the child “functional” sentences that only serve one purpose (like, “may I go to the bathroom please?”). Instead, model shorter sentences that can be broken apart later and used for different purposes (like, “I need the bathroom”. Can be divided later into “I need...the bathroom”)
- 
- Three thin, parallel lines of varying lengths and slight curves, extending from the left side towards the right, positioned at the bottom of the slide.

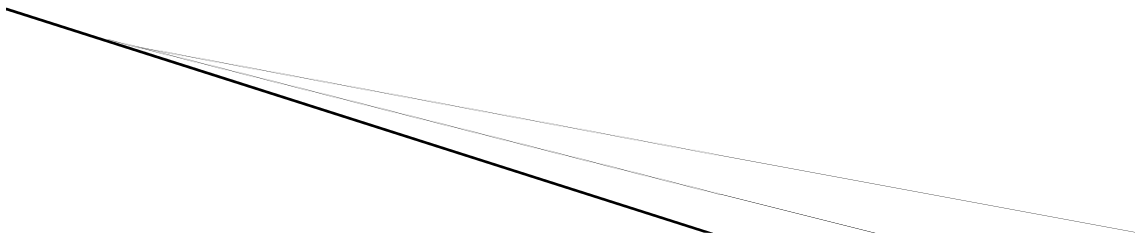
Helpful Tips for Parents / Teachers

- ▶ Model useful phrases that the child will be able to break apart and use pieces of later, like “I like it!” (this can be switched around later to be “I like...” with something else)
- ▶ If the child already says many phrases/sentences, show the child how to break them apart and recombine to make new phrases. For example, “Let’s get out of here” and “want some more” can be recombined into “let’s get some more” or “want out of here”



Helpful Tips for Parents / Teachers

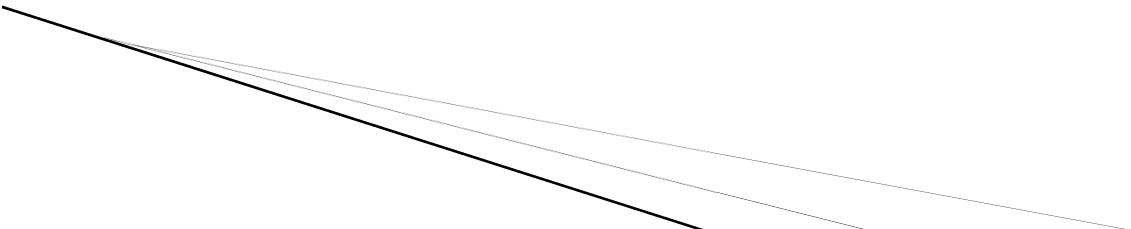
- ▶ Help the child practice new language skills with many different conversational partners, including peers
- ▶ If necessary, teach the child when it is OK to repeat or script and when it is not
- ▶ Continue to respond to a child's echolalia. Don't pretend that it's "not real speech" and ignore it. This is the child's way of trying to connect with you!



References

Blanc, M. (2012). *Natural language acquisition on the autism spectrum: The journey from echolalia to self-generated language*. Madison, WI: Communication Development Center.

American Journal of Speech–Language Pathology, November 2015, Vol. 24, 750–762.
doi:10.1044/2015_AJSLP-14-0166
<http://ajslp.pubs.asha.org/article.aspx?articleid=2397394>

Three thin, light-colored lines radiate from the bottom left corner of the slide, extending towards the right and slightly upwards.