



# Our Words are Powerful



PROJECT ACCESS

## WHY?

The way we talk to and about our students can really set the stage for how students view themselves and how others view them. As educators, our goal should be to create an environment where students feel loved, supported, and welcome. This starts with us and shifting how we talk about our students and to our students!

## BEHAVIOR

It can be so easy as educators to talk to our friends, family, and other staff members about student's behaviors using negative terms especially when it is dangerous or aggressive. Many times, behaviors and behavior goals are attached to our student's IEP, so behavior is on a need to know basis and protected by federal laws. When we do need to talk about a student's behavior for the purposes of intervention strategies or another person's safety, we should strive to do so in a respectful way.

For example, "Katie is one of my learners with more intensive support needs. She is currently communicating with pictures, and we are working on some target behaviors for property destruction."

“Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate, and to humble.”  
*Yehuda Berg*

## COMMUNICATION

“Non-verbal” is one of the most common terms we hear when we talk about learners who do not vocally communicate. To help our communication partners be able to communicate with our students more effectively, we can inform them of how our non-speaking students do communicate! For example, “they are currently navigating communication methods,” “they are using pictures to communicate,” or “She communicates using ASL.”

## “THEIR OWN LITTLE WORLD”

Sometimes it may seem like our students are in their own little world. That's typically because what is going on around them just isn't interesting to them. As educators, it is our job to figure out what our students are interested in and join their world. We can do this by learning about their interest, incorporating their strengths, and really getting to know our students!



# IT'S A SPECTRUM

When we describe our students as “high functioning” or “low functioning” it indicates a few things. 1. Our student does or does not need supports based on their determined functioning level and 2. Functioning levels are stagnant and do not change.

THIS IS NOT TRUE! Students need differing levels of supports based on their abilities in different areas and these abilities can vary from day to day! There may be some days our students are able to communicate using words and other days, they may need communication devices or supports to communicate effectively. Functioning levels are fluid!

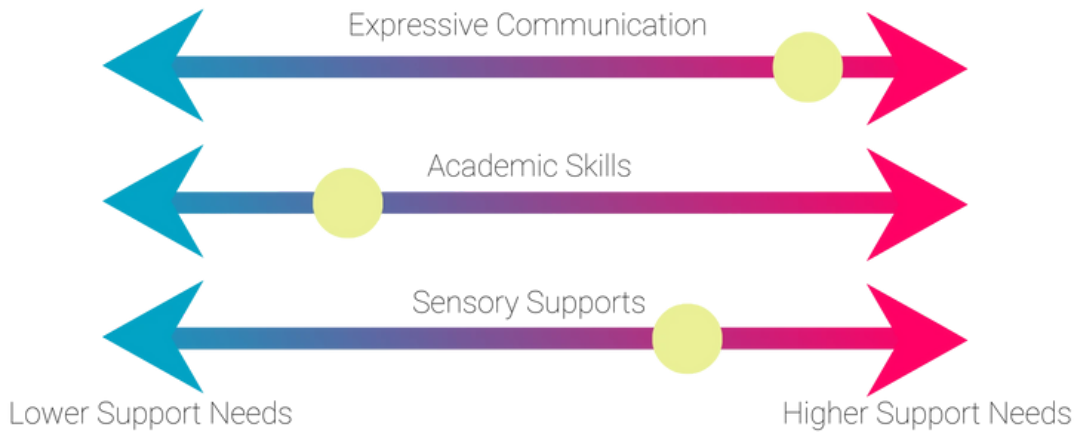
Let's change how we communicate to other educators about our students. We can help them know the information they need to best help our students by saying, “This is my student Tommy. He has high sensory support needs and low support needs in communication today.” This lets the person working with Tommy know how they can best support him today.

## Autism Spectrum

The Autism Spectrum is not Linear:



The Autism Spectrum looks more like this:



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Neurodiversity Affirming Language Brief Guide](#)

[Neurodiversity- Affirming Language from Reframing Autism](#)



GET  
CONNECTED!



© PROJECT ACCESS - SEPTEMBER 2022 \*PROJECT ACCESS IS A COLLABORATION AMONG THE MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY, AND MISSOURI'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS.