

Chapter 3 Family Handout

READING FACES

An inability to read faces is a part of the nonverbal social-communication disorder that affects children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and related disabilities. Following are some constructive things that you can try when teaching your child how to read other people's faces.

- If you are upset with your child and he has not responded to your repeated "looks," assume he is not very good at interpreting nonverbal language.
- If you talk about a problem with your child, try to remain calm, kind, and friendly. Model calm responding. This will help keep you calm as well as your child.
- Keep in mind that everyone has a "resting face." This is how a person's face looks when he or she is not thinking about anything in particular. Some people have very friendly resting faces, but others have irritated or even mean-looking resting faces. If your child repetitively asks you if you are mad at her, then you can assume she is having difficulty figuring out how to read your face (or body language) and is personalizing your resting face. Try not to get frustrated with her if she repeatedly questions you about whether or not you are mad; instead, try to teach her how to look for clues that will help her figure out how you really feel.
- Your child might have a mean-looking resting face. This can cause you to think that he is angrier than he really is. People actually read faces quickly, which influences how someone "hears" a person's words. If your child has a problem making his face match his emotion, then someone might see him as threatening even though his behavior is actually just a little irritating.