

Key guidelines in aiding communication in Total Communication environment

There are many difficulties people experience with communication, but there are also many key factors that can make all aspects of communication easier.

- **Consistency** - when introducing or using a certain form of communication, such as sign or picture communication, it helps if everyone is on board and using that form of communication consistently. If we are encouraging an individual to use a system, it will only work if we are all using it. When introducing a system of communication, make sure there is a structure in place so that everyone knows how to use the communication system appropriately and uses it at every opportunity. Inconsistency and switching between different forms of communication, will not encourage the individual to use that system consistently and add to confusion.
- **Signing systems** - make sure everyone knows the relevant signs, and where possible give the sign as well as the spoken word to give extra cues and add meaning to the message.
- **Access** - be sure to put pictures and objects in places that are accessible both for reach, and visually.
- **Language level** - remember if a client has an understanding at a one word level, use one word commands. Long sentences containing lots of information will be wasted. Evidence shows that some challenging behaviour is caused by individuals not understanding commands.. If you use more than one word, back it up with a visual, or a sign or gesture.
- **Questions** - know when to use open and closed questions. Closed questions require a short answer, often “yes” or “no”, open questions seek longer answers. If you are trying to encourage more language, use open questions.



- **Give time to process, understand and respond** - processing speed may be impaired with some individuals. Some people need longer to process verbal information. Try giving individuals up to 10 seconds (count silently in your head) to think about what you have said. Alternatively make your message easier to understand by using less language or offering more cues such as gesture, sign or visuals.
- **Eliciting language** - you cannot force a response. Asking a client to say a word does not mean they understand what they are saying. Better to put language in, than try and pull it out. Provide opportunities for a response (e.g. talk about what the student is doing, expand on their language, start a sentence but let them finish it).
- **Adaptation** - if the message is not being understood, be flexible. Change the language or complexity of language. Change the mode of communication e.g. from verbal to picture. Give the individual other ways to respond such as switches, sign, gesture etc. Give them more time to process the message. Change your goals or expectations if things are not working.
- **Back-up** - have a set of resources that you can access when trying to help someone understand. Have a picture communication book at hand. Have a gesture or communication dictionary for each individual so that new staff know what they are trying to communicate.
- **The environment** - it is important to create an environment that is conducive to communication. Some communicators have sensory sensitivities, hearing or visual impairment or are easily distracted. For this reason it is important to provide an environment that is “communication friendly”. Use environmental cues, the right lighting, a reduction in background noise, access to visuals etc
- **Use your body and face** - facial expression not only sends a message on its own it can greatly enhance or change a verbal message. Use body language, gesture, and facial expressions to enhance your message. Research shows that over 50% of your message is conveyed via body language.



- **Use touch** - touch cues used appropriately can communicate and instructions. Touch cues may help individuals understand activities, people and places. For instance, a hand on the shoulder may mean “sit down”, or guiding an individual to touch your watch may make them aware of who you are, if that is your touch cue.
- **Use texture and objects** - in there simplest form textures or objects can be used to give individuals an idea of what is about to happen e.g. give them a spoon and they know its time for lunch, or a towel before going swimming. However, by combining textures and shapes you can create many more complex options to allow the individual to communicate, make choices, learn language and organise. If we develop the use of textures, objects and symbols, we can improve organisational skills, sequencing, and develop language concepts.
- **Use environmental cues** - this is a general description for many cues that are around us. They can include pictures, logos, colours, noise and texture. By using these around our environment we can enhance understanding and independence.
- **Face to face** - when communicating with another person make sure you are facing them. It is important to be at the same level as the person you are communicating with. Look at them when they are communicating.
- **Use pictures and visuals** - visuals and pictures can work for many individuals with communication difficulties. Visual strategies can be used in a multitude of ways to enhance understanding and expression. Visual schedules can be used to help with understanding. Visuals are particularly useful for non-verbal individuals, individuals with learning difficulties and or those with autism.
- **Use print** - using a printed word or recognisable symbol system can be used when other forms of communication fail. If speech is not an option, can the individual write or draw to get their message across.



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- **Use AAC / Assistive Technology / Assistive communication** - assistive technology is a generic term that includes assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices with a focus on facilitating communication. An assistive device can be hi-tech (an electronic device) or lo-tech (picture, book E-tran frame).
 - **Use your speech and voice** - many people with communication impairment are still able to use their voice and speech. We must be aware of the complexity of our language and remember to pitch our language at a level that the listener will understand and give them plenty of time to process the information. If the individual lacks other skills such as social skills, understanding, intonation, eye contact, topic maintenance, proximity, turn-taking etc, try and use another form of communication alongside speech to enhance the message.

For more information and strategies around all forms of communication and communication impairment see our website - www.icommunicatetherapy.com.



To learn more about Assistive Communication, Total Communication, and all aspects of communication, you can read about and purchase books on our website www.icommunicatetherapy.com. Click this link to see our online Resource Centre [Book Shop](#)

Augmentative & Alternative Communication: Supporting Children & Adults With Complex Communication Needs by David R. Beukelman and Pat Mirenda

AAC from A to Z (Augmentative and Alternative Communications Perspectives) by Lyle L. Lloyd, Helen H. Arvidson, and Donald Fuller

Assistive Technology: Principles and Applications for Communication Disorders and Special Education by Raymond W. Quist, Lyle L. Lloyd, and Helen H. Arvidson

Handbook Of Augmentative And Alternative Communication by Sharon L. Glennen and Denise C. DeCoste

Augmentative and Alternative Communication for Adults with Acquired Neurologic Disorders by David R. Beukelman, Kathryn M. Yorkston, and Joe, Ph.D. Reichle

Building Communicative Competence With Individuals Who Use Augmentative and Alternative Communication by Janice C., Ph.D. Light and Cathy Binger

Communication and Adults with Learning Disabilities by Anna van der Gaag and Klara Dormandy

Adults with Learning Difficulties by Alex Kelly

Finding You, Finding Me: Using Intensive Interaction to Get in Touch With People With Severe Learning Disabilities Combined With Autistic Spectrum Disorder by Phoebe Caldwell

Access to Communication: Developing the Basics of Communication with People with Severe Learning Difficulties Through Intensive Interaction by Nind & Hewett

The Child With Special Needs: Encouraging Intellectual and Emotional Growth by Stanley I. Greenspan, Serena Wieder, and Robin Simons

Socially Speaking: Pragmatic Social Skills Programme for Pupils with Mild to Moderate Learning Disabilities by Alison Schroeder and Jacqueline M. Jomain