

Top Tips for Communication Development

For Early Communicators and the People Who Support Them

Early communicators may use gestures, sounds, eye gaze (looking), and other behaviours to try and get their messages across. These tips and tools can be useful in helping young people to develop their communication skills further. They can learn more about the reasons people communicate, what they can say, what it means, and how they can say it. The following tips can help develop communication in all of these areas.

Use what you know, say what you see:

Notice when your young person communicates through actions, body language or other behaviours. For example, if your young person pushes a food item away during mealtime you will likely know what they are communicating. You can help them learn to say “no thanks”, “don’t want (or like) that” or “finished” in ways others will understand. You can do this by saying and signing words like “no”, “finished” and pointing to “no”, “finished” or “don’t like it” symbols (see “Use Aided Language Modeling” below).



Pause and wait expectantly:



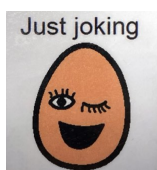
When engaged in a game or activity with repetition (such as “tickles”), pause before offering more of the action the young person is enjoying. Look for signs your young person wants “more” of the action then say “more” and repeat the action.

Imitate to relate:

Imitation can often help us to reach our early communicators where they are. Imitating their facial expressions, body language, eye gaze, body position, pauses and actions can show you are with them. This technique can help develop enjoyment of being with another person, sharing personal space, noticing what others are doing, taking turns, using and understanding eye contact, facial expressions, body language and other important early communication skills.



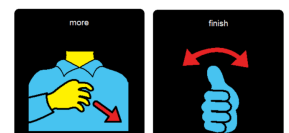
Use motivating, exciting language



Pair motivating activities with exciting language. Say, sign and point to symbols representing words and phrases that will catch your young person’s attention such as “wow!”, “uh oh!”, “hurry up!”, “just joking!”, and so on. For example, when sending toy cars down a ramp or slide into coloured water, you pause (wait expectantly), then say, “hurry up!”. When the car hits the water and makes a splash, you say, “wow!”. If the car falls off the ramp or gets stuck you say, “uh oh!”.

Be Ready with Visual Supports (Augmentative Alternative Communication, AAC)

Wear lanyard visuals, carry a core board and have them within reach and view all of the time. This makes it easy to reach and use to support communication through the day.



Use Aided Language Modeling



The best way to teach your young person how to use visuals to communicate is through Aided Language Modeling. This means pointing to key symbols on a board or system during natural interactions with your young person. Over time, your young person will begin to notice you doing this and learn to say the messages you are modeling.