

Communication for DeafBlind Children Who Are Early Communicators

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A Quote:

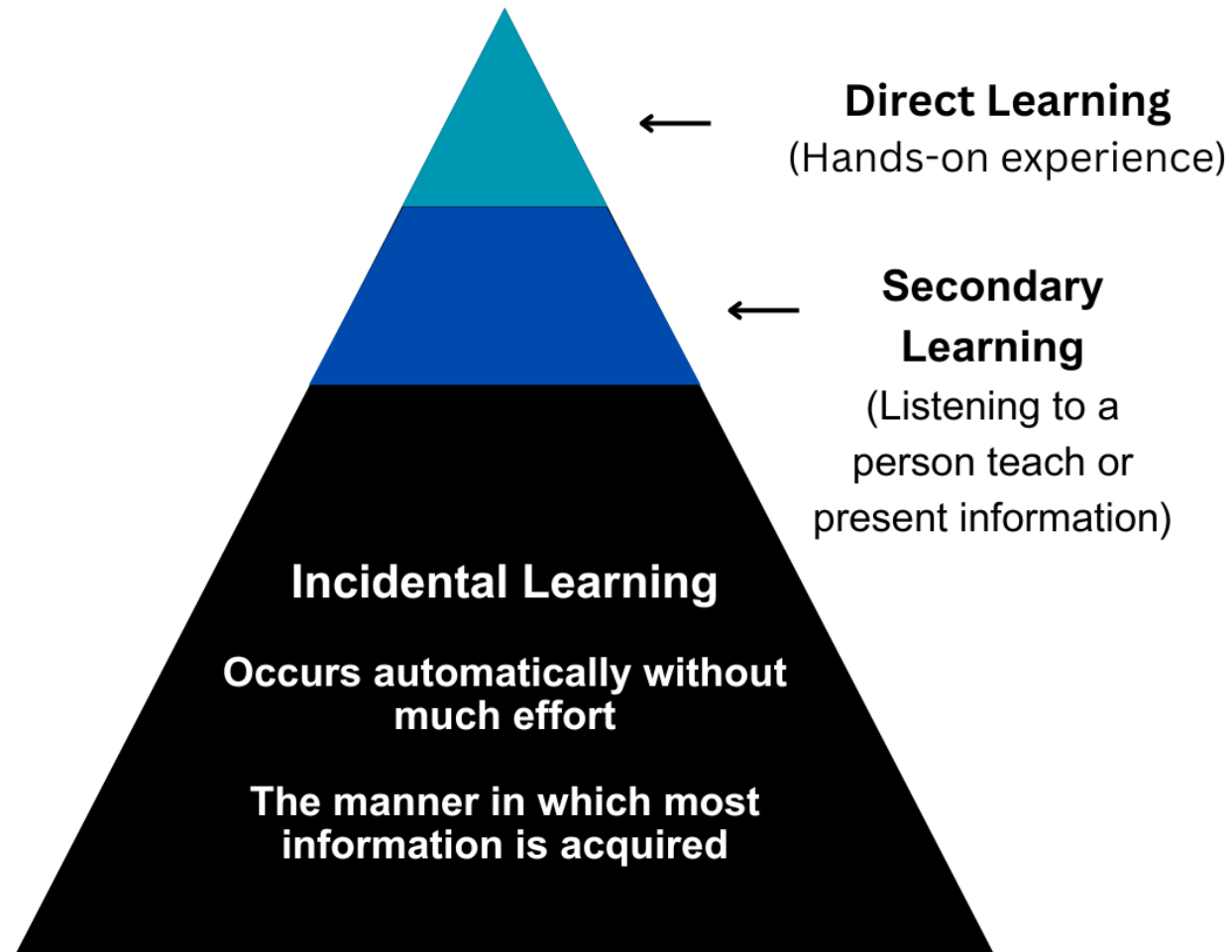
“My teacher (parent) thought I was smarter than I was.
So I was.”

-Student

Deafblindness is a Disability of Access

- **Concept development:** Incidental learning severely compromised.
- **Communication impact:** Access to sounds is incomplete, missing sound endings (e.g., /t/ - 'ed'), concept of time. Discrimination in noisy classrooms is difficult to impossible. May have significant difficulty learning American Sign Language incidentally.
- **Social impact:** Limited or no access to facial expressions and tone of voice. Frequent social isolation, inability to "overhear" or "oversee" conversations and learn from others' experiences.

Hearing and Sighted Learner



- 90% of learning is incidental

- Learning **progresses** from the known to the unknown



Sensory Challenges Turn Learning Upside Down



DeafBlind Learner

Direct Learning

The best way for the student who is deafblind to learn

Hands on experiences are essential

← Secondary learning is difficult

← Incidental learning usually does not occur or is inaccurate & ineffective

Hula Hoop of Access



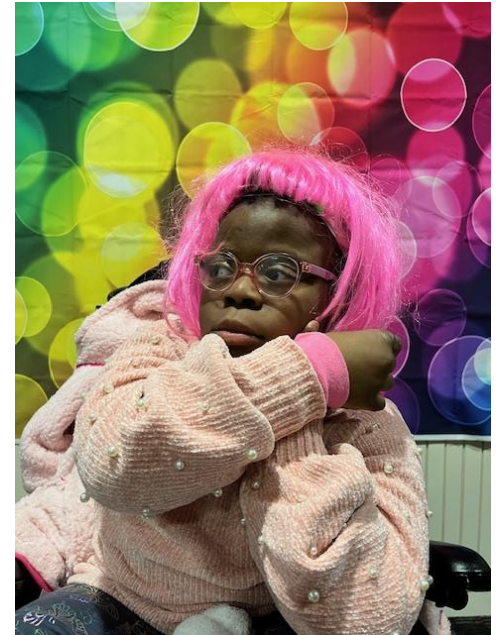
Ground Rules for Communication

ALL people are communicative

Communication begins at birth

Communication develops in stages

Our **responses** to people with disabilities **can help** or **hinder communication development**



What is Communication?

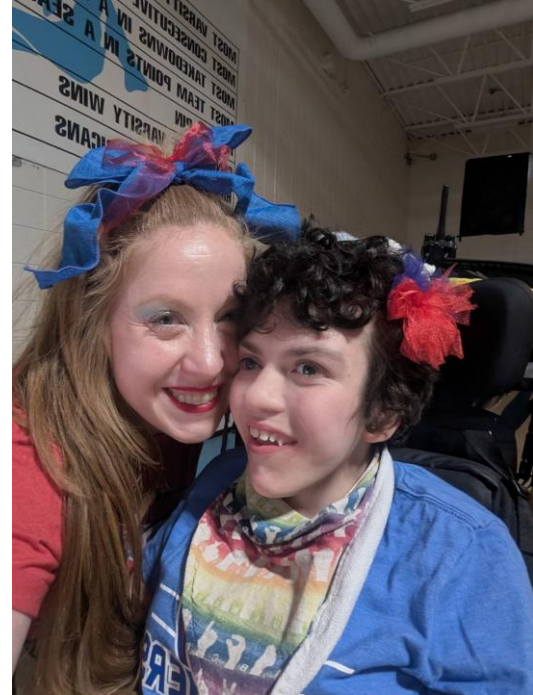
- Communication is **Connection**
- **Behavior** is Communication
- Individuals learn-develop to the next level of communication- **when their behavior has an effect on their environment**

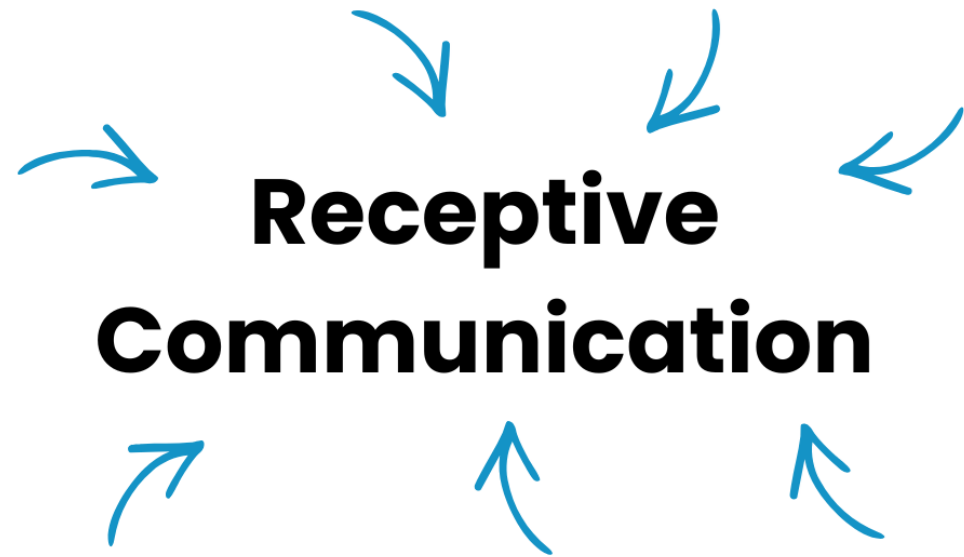


Every **interaction** with another human is a **conversation**.

One person **sends** the information.

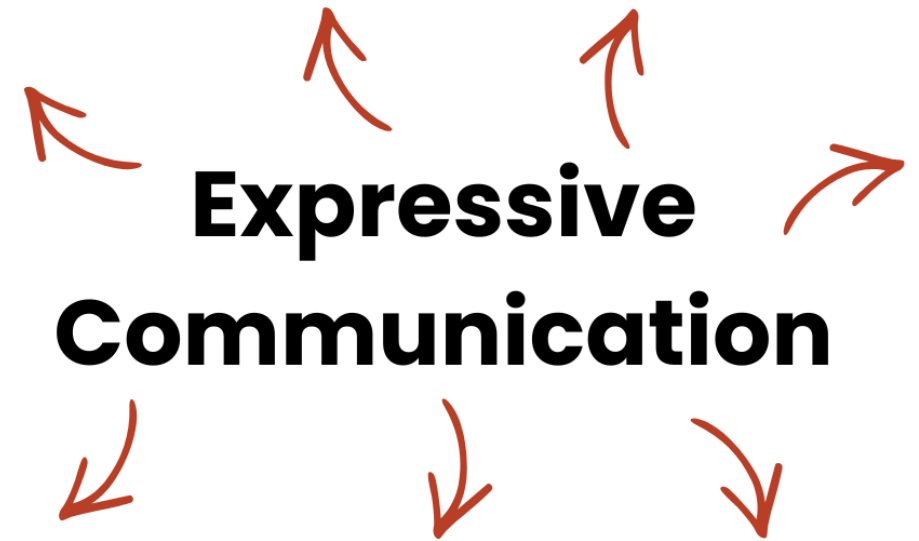
The other person **receives** the information.





All of the ways the child receives communication information.

This will come from anyone who is communicating with them.



All of the ways the child lets others know their needs, wants, likes, dislikes, thoughts and more.

A Basic Interaction

Attract a person's attention to begin the communication exchange

Direct the person's attention to the topic of communication



Provide the partner with an opportunity to take their turn

Fill one's own turn in the exchange

The Communication Matrix

www.communicationmatrix.org



- The assessment targets early expressive communication, which encompasses skills that typically develop between birth to 24 months, the age when language typically begins.
- This is a tool that the school team takes the lead on, but family input is crucial.
- It showcases what the child **CAN** communicate!

Pre-Symbolic Levels

Pre-intentional behaviors (reflexes, like crying which is interpreted by adults)



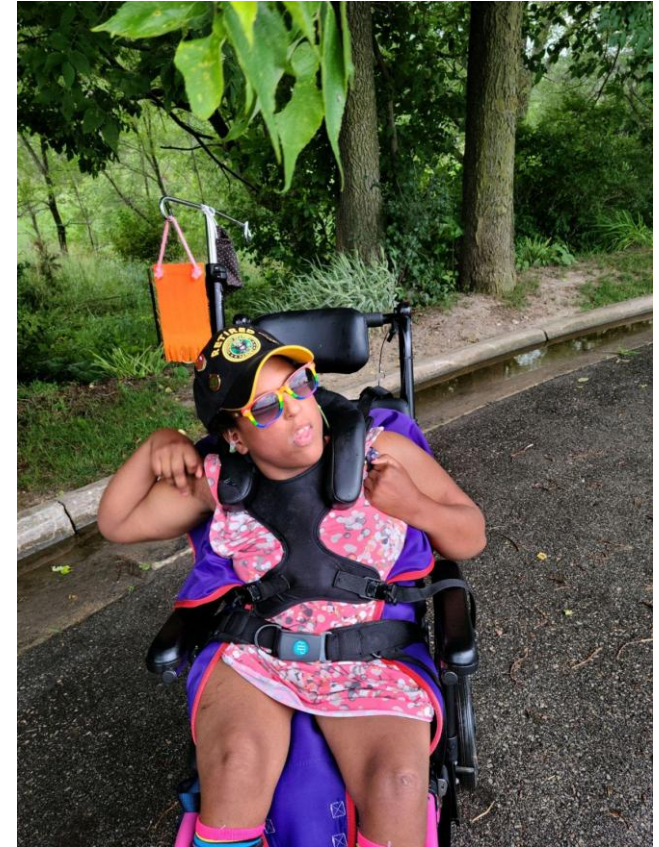
Pre-Symbolic Levels, cont.

Intentional- but not purposefully communicative behaviors – kicking, turning head away – interpreted by adult, but not directed toward adult.



Pre-Symbolic Levels, cont.

Pre-symbolic, non-conventional behaviors- (like tugging on adult, pushing things away) that are directed to a communication partner. This is a critical stage because now the child understands that he can impact someone else's behavior. He is **intentionally** communicating because he acknowledges a communication partner



Characteristics of Intentionality

Performs behavior only when the individual knows another person is present (except for “distance” behaviors such as vocalizing)

Persistence

Repetition

Alternating gaze (body orientation, leaning toward)

Changing the signal used

Awaiting a response

Terminating the signal when responded to

Indicating satisfaction or dissatisfaction to response

Pre-Symbolic Levels, cont.

Pre-symbolic, conventional behaviors-like pointing, nodding head, waving.



Symbolic Levels



- **Concrete Symbols-** that physically resemble what they represent in a way that is obvious to the child – they look like, feel like, move like or sound like what they represent.
- **Abstract symbols-** such as speech, manual signs, or Braille or print words. These symbols do not look, feel, or sound like what they represent. They are used one at a time.
- **Language-**Combines symbols (any sort of symbols) into ordered two or three-symbol combinations (“want juice”, “me want juice”), according to grammatical rules.

Receptive Communication

INPUT that is processed by the
person **RECEIVING** the information
in order to understand their
environment

Think of a computer...

Computer programs don't run well if the command function is not entered completely and accurately



Computer input does not happen automatically-people enter the information very purposefully

Like computer processing, if input is appropriate, adequate and consistent- the "Output" or response will be accurate

Things to ponder...

Every piece of information that a communication partner sends to us is **receptive communication**

Everything we learn and everything we know-comes to us as **receptive communication**



Things to ponder...

How well we learn and know the information depends on our ability to **access and process the receptive communication accurately.**

Children rely on **our** ability to send the information to them in a competent and accessible manner.



Receptive Functions (Reasons)

- Greeting
- Gain attention
- Deliver a message
- Continuation
- Finished
- Answer yes/no questions
- Answer “wh” questions
- Make a choice
- Give a command or directive
- Tell them you are leaving



Receptive Forms (Ways)

Receiving information

NON-SYMBOLIC

Body Movements
Head Turns
Eye Gaze
Actions on People and
Objects
Signals
Gestures and Pointing
Vocalizations

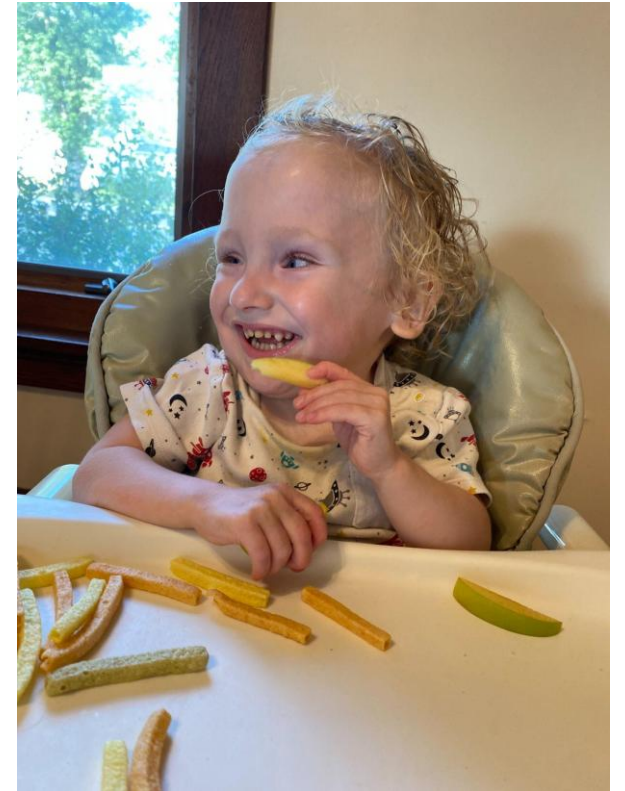
SYMBOLIC

Pictures
Photos
Drawings
Objects
Partial Objects
Sign Language
Print
Spoken Language
Braille

Supporting Receptive Communication

Receptive communication begins with the partner **modeling** in the individual's preferred mode of communication.

- *Receptive* communication across all levels should include multiple forms (**touch cues, object cues, spoken, sign**) to encourage and support understanding.
- Multiple forms support the individual's comprehension.



Expressive Communication

The **OUTPUT** component of the communication exchange.

The way (form) the person communicates and the purpose (function) of that communication as **they send information to us.**

Ways We Express Ourselves

Look at the last 2-3 text messages on your phone.

What were reasons for your communication exchanges?



Expressive Functions (Reasons)

- To request attention
- To request affection
- To request assistance
- To make choices
- To answer questions
- To request wants, needs (food, objects, etc.)
- Protest

- Refusal
- Continuance or more
- Cessation- "I want to stop"
- Greeting
- Fatigue/boredom
- Pleasure
- Frustration
- Anger
- Pain

Expressive Forms (Ways)

NON-SYMBOLIC

- Changes in muscle tone
- Body Movements
- Head Turns
- Eye Gaze/3 Point Gaze
- Smiling/Laughing
- Crying/Whining
- Actions on People and Objects
- Signals
- Gestures and Pointing
- Vocalizations
- Biting/Hitting
- Hugging

SYMBOLIC

- Pictures
- Photos
- Drawings
- Objects
- Partial Objects
- Sign Language
- Print
- Spoken Language
- Braille

Points to Consider:

All of these behaviors can be interpreted as having a purpose or function (**communicative intent**) based on the context in which the behavior is observed.

We are more likely to understand the purpose or function of the behavior if it's observed in naturally occurring routines and activities.



Concepts

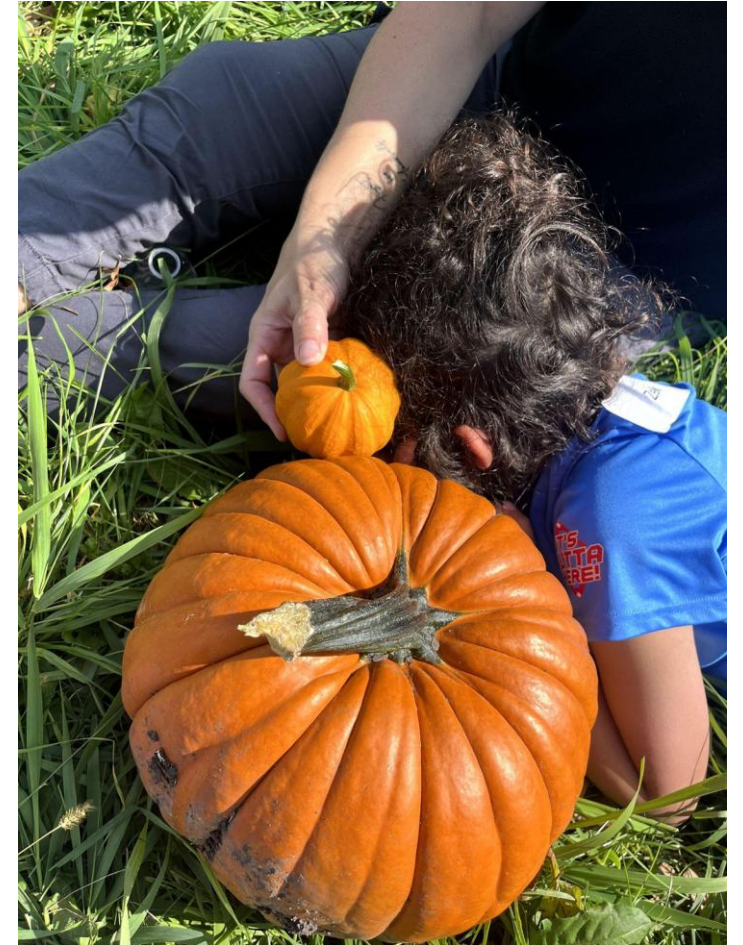
We learn concepts
by experiences
and/or by watching
others.



Important Concepts

How the world works

- Routines
- Cause and effect
- Purpose and use of objects
- Where things come from
- The natural world and its cycles and laws
- Objects and people have names



Important Concepts

How things are sequenced

- Beginning/end
- Order of activities
- Time concepts



Important Concepts

Self Concept (the mental perception one has of oneself)

- I exist and have feelings
- I can do things
- I affect people and objects around me



Important Concepts

Social Concepts

- Greetings and introductions
- How to play
- Expectations in social situations



Tactile Observation



Your Child's Interests

- Use topics/activities that the individual wants to talk about, not the partner. The higher the interest, the more motivating and the greater the success.
- Begin with experiences known and preferred by the individual (park, grandma's, pets, highly motivating activities, people closest to the individual). Reminder: Learning goes from the known to the unknown.
- Likes/dislikes are often based on the world the individual knows and their abilities. Systematically identifying these interests helps the team determine what motivates the individual. It will help to understand where to begin and how to increase opportunities to



Likes & Dislikes Form

Resources



"LIKES" INFORMATION



Child:	Date:
--------	-------

FOODS taste/ texture	SMELLS	TOUCH texture/ hugs/ fabrics light - heavy	MOVEMENT rock/ bounce swing	VIBRATION car ride toys/ appliances	SIGHTS lights/colors	SOUNDS voices/ music pitch/ loudness environmental

MUSCLES push - pull bear weight	PEOPLE	PLACES	ACTIVITIES	TOYS	SELF STIMULATION BEHAVIORS	OTHER

"DISLIKES" INFORMATION



Child:	Date:
---------------	--------------

FOODS taste/ texture	SMELLS	TOUCH texture/ hugs/ fabrics light - heavy	MOVEMENT rock/ bounce swing	VIBRATION car ride toys/ appliances	SIGHTS lights/colors	SOUNDS voices/ music pitch/ loudness environmental

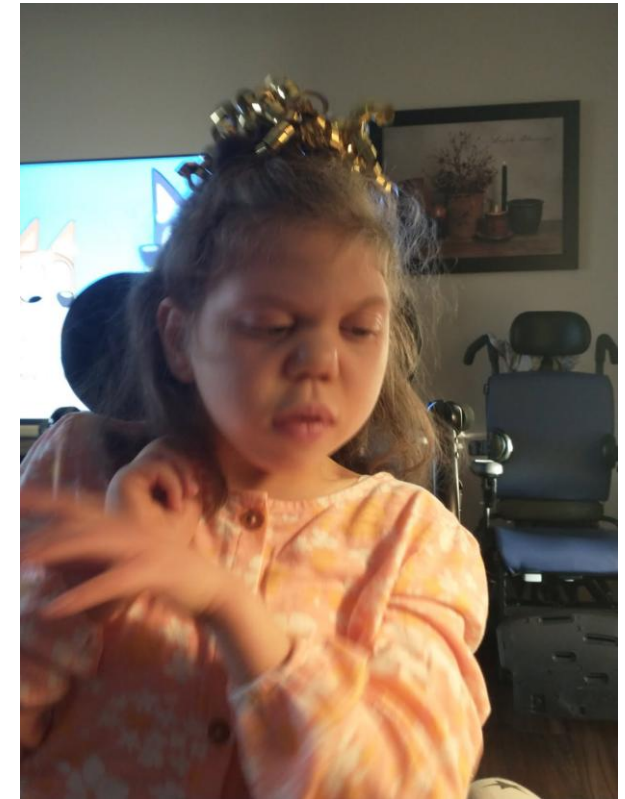
MUSCLES push - pull bear weight	PEOPLE	PLACES	ACTIVITIES	TOYS	SELF STIMULATION BEHAVIORS	OTHER

Responsive Environments

Strategies to Help



- Encourage intentional behavior by creating highly responsive environments.
- Respond to **potentially communicative behaviors** so that learners **become aware** of their **communicative purpose**.
- Provide **opportunities** in **multiple activities** that encourage the **child to turn to a communication partner** to get what they **want**, **end what they don't like**, or **get attention**.



Joint Tactile Attention

Strategies to Help



Joint tactile attention means looking at the world together.

- Joint tactile attention is the basis for language development.
- It should be established as an ongoing part of the relationship.
- Joint tactile attention is when two people are looking at or doing something together.
- It's the equivalent of using the pointing gesture for a student with sight.





Playing Games Together

- Create a turn-taking sequence using imitation.
- When an individual produces a behavior (for example, makes a sound, shakes a sound toy, etc.), briefly imitate the behavior.
- Stop and wait for the individual to resume the behavior.
- Imitate the individual again, then stop and wait
- Once the sequence is established, try modifying the response to see if they will imitate the modified response. (Level2)



Playing to Encourage Expressive Communication

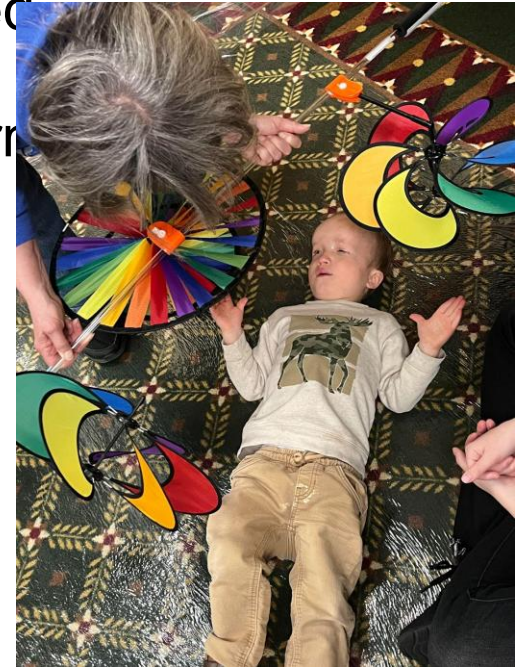
Strategies to Help



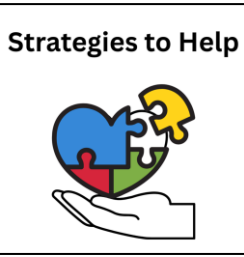
Turn-taking Routines- A type of social interaction which is characterized by mutual participation and engagement between the communication partner and the individual in which the two participants take several turns contingent upon one another's behavior.

Example of a Turn-Taking Activity

- 1) Select a very enjoyable activity the individual loves
- 2) Begin activity
- 3) Interrupt activity and wait for a response
- 4) If individual responds, resume activity
- 5) If child does not respond, prompt an appropriate response
- 6) Repeat several times trying to extend activities across several turns so that it becomes a game



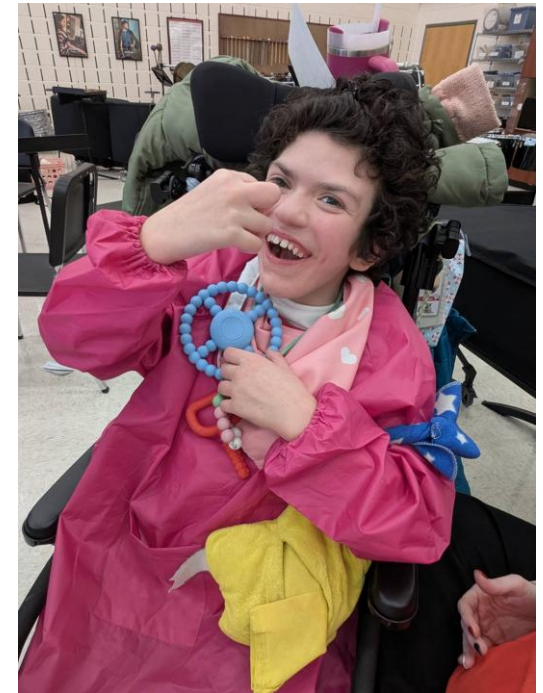
Playing to Encourage Expressive Communication



Encourage intentional behavior by creating a highly responsive environment to promote “contingency awareness”

Example of an activity to promote more

1. Select an enjoyable activity the individual loves
2. Begin the activity
3. Interrupt the activity after several seconds
4. Wait quietly
5. If the individual responds in a way that indicates a desire for more of the activity, say, “Okay, I see you want more _____”, and resume the activity.
6. Repeat



Finger Tap Play



Partner's Response Dictionary

Partner's Response Dictionary

Student: _____

Each time _____DOES this.....	It will be interpreted to MEAN this.....	My communication partner will DO this.....	My communication partner will SAY this.....	How my communication partner will shape my behavior to an INTENTIONAL behavior.....
Ex. smile during an activity	Ex. I like this	Ex. Respond to smile	Ex. "You like this"	Ex. Continue activity

Resources



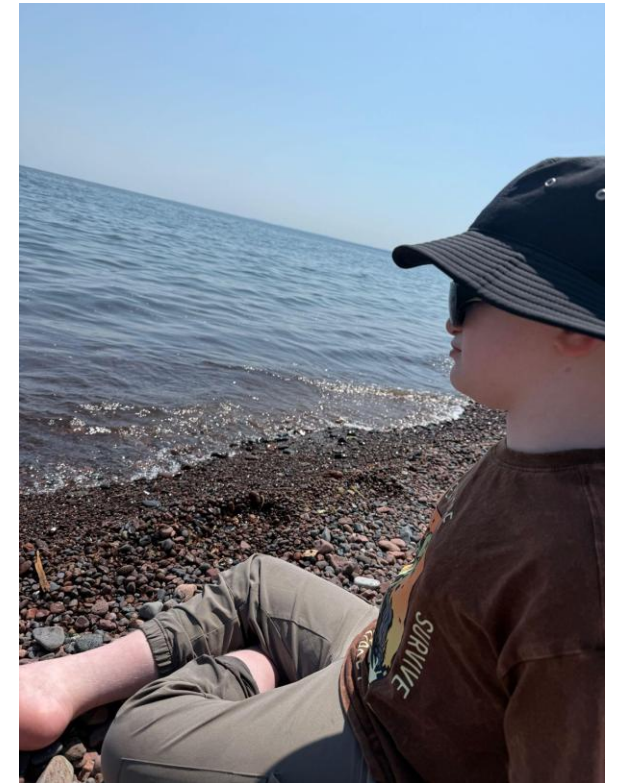


Wait Time

Pace, Process, Wait

- 1) **Pace:** Set a pace for going through a task, interaction, or event that matches the child's ability to follow what is happening.
- 2) **Process:** Give the child time to adjust to and take in new information.
- 3) **Wait:** Wait until the child is ready to continue or respond.

Wait time can be longer for children who are deafblind, sometimes up to 1 minute.





Wait Time

Nolan's Family:
The Importance
of Wait Time



Hand-Under-Hand

This technique involves gently placing your hands underneath or alongside the hands of the child to help them explore and engage with the world around them.

When used effectively, hand-under-hand provides respectful, tactile support to encourage children to interact and communicate.

“A child’s hands are their eyes and ears. Controlling or physically manipulating a child’s hands is akin to blindfolding a sighted person.”



Let's Practice!



Strategies to Help



- Hand-Under-Hand Technique-NCDB Practice Guide
- The Hand-Under-Hand Technique Video

Resources



Zari's Family:
Using Touch to
Access
Information

Routines

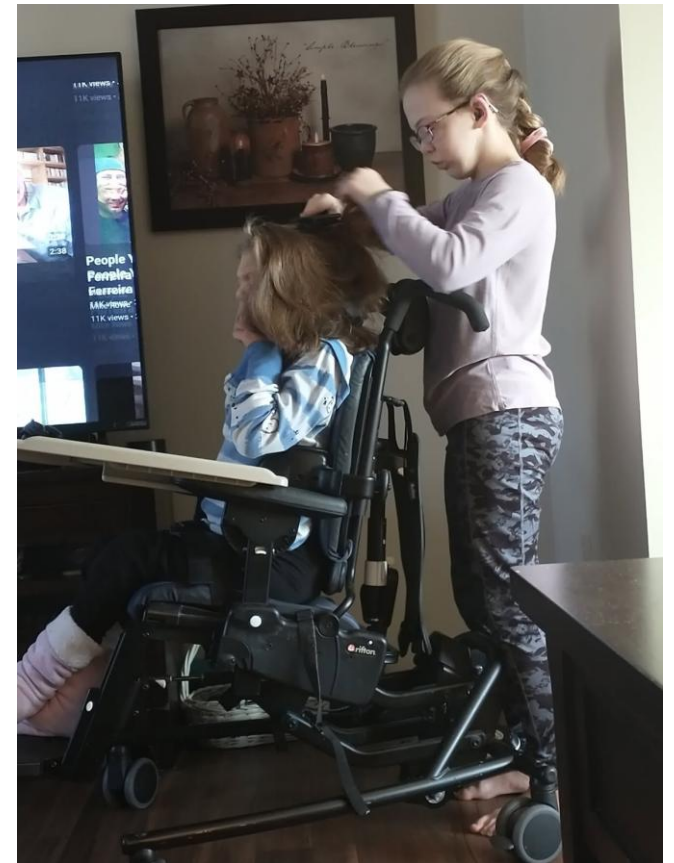
Strategies to Help



Develop (and document) routines to build consistency across environments and communication partners.

Incorporate communication opportunities into your typical routines throughout the day.

- How will you provide receptive communication?
 - Touch cues
 - Tactile objects
 - ASL
 - Voice



Definition of Routines

A routine is a related series of activities:

- organized into a **predictable** format;
- offering opportunities to develop communication skills and concepts;
and, supporting opportunities to develop relationships.

Routines provide the structure on which the individual connects their own experiences and builds concepts.

Examples: getting ready for school, mealtime, reading a book, bath time, personal cares



Benefits of Routines



- Individual learns to **anticipate**.
- An individual feels **safe** and a sense of **control** when there is understanding.
- **Stress** is reduced in a predictable routine.
- Concepts are introduced, laying the foundation for communication and all learning.

Components of a Routine

Effective routines have a beginning, middle, and end.

- **Initiate** – How will the individual know it is time to begin?
- **Prepare** – What does the individual need to do to be ready?
- **Perform Activity** – How will the individual participate *or partially participate*?
- **Terminate** – How will the individual know when the activity is over?



Making Choices

- Present individual with an array of objects to examine/select. Consider naming each object, especially for individuals with visual acuity or processing difficulties.
- Explore new objects/activities with shared/motivating features in multiple opportunities.
- Increase activities in which the individual can make choices.

Strategies to Help



The image shows a title card with a light blue background. In the center is a white rectangular area with slightly irregular edges, resembling a piece of paper. This white area is framed by two vertical dashed lines on each side, which are part of a larger solid blue border. The text is centered within the white area.

Zari's Family
Tactile
Communication



Touch Cues

A **touch cue** is:

- tactile contact
- made in a consistent manner
- presented directly on the individual's body
- used to receptively communicate with the individual



Touch Cues Purpose

The purpose of a **touch cue** is:

- to communicate a variety of **partner's intents** (e.g., request information, praise, greeting)
- to reduce an individual's startle, or challenging behaviors by helping the individual anticipate what is going to occur

Touch cues are intended to support comprehension.



Guidelines for Using Touch Cues

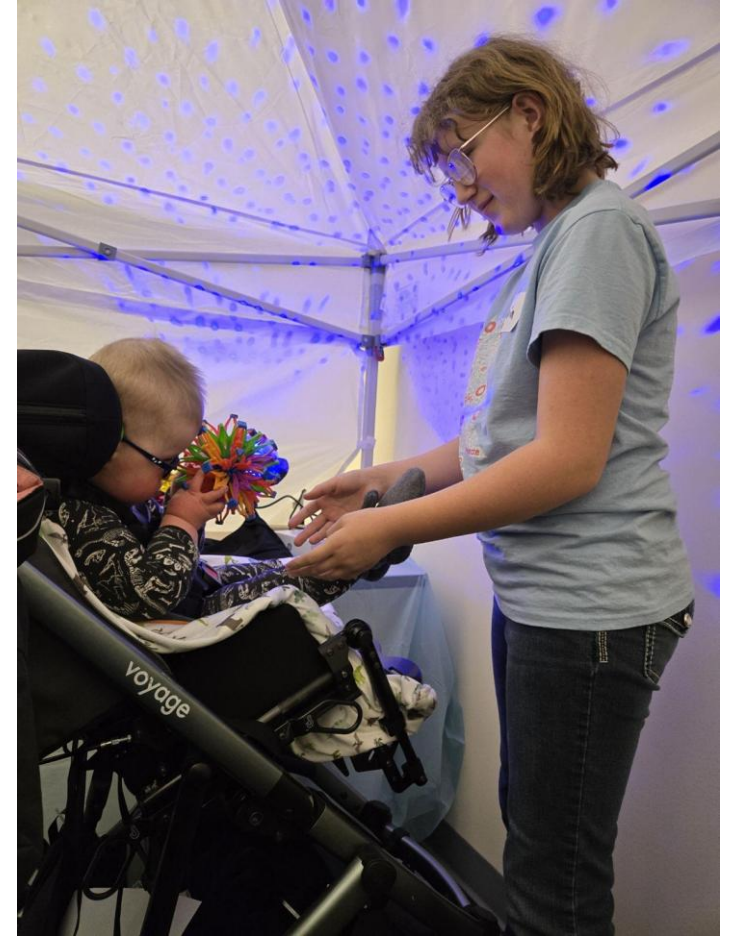


- Consider the individual's preferences when selecting both the *type of*, and *placement for*, a **touch cue**.
- NEVER force an individual to accept a **touch cue**, or to engage in mutual touch "conversations."
- **Touch cues** should be easy for the individual to differentiate from routine physical contact.

Touch Cues Note

Be mindful that some individuals may react differently to touch. People may need to adjust their approach to provide wait time, pressure, and placement of the touch. Do not give up.

Family members are often the best resource when selecting touch cues.



Examples of Touch Cues

- Tapping the individual's bottom (in supine) - "I'm going to lift your hips."
(for diaper or brief change)
- Gently pulling up on the individual's upper arms - "Get ready to stand up."
- Touching the individual's left elbow - "This is the way I say 'Hi,' so you know who I am."
- Rubbing the middle of the individual's back - "I like that."

Note: For older individuals, consider appropriate placement of touch on the body.



Touch Cue Maps

Touch Cue Map

Touch the hair before beginning to brush hair gently.

Gentle hand on the back of the shoulder so the child knows that you are there and pushing the wheelchair.

Gently tap beneath arms in an upward direction before picking up.

Two or three gentle taps beneath the ankles in an upward direction before lifting legs for personal cares (changing).



Touch Cue Map

Rub child's back to say "good job"

Gently rub chin twice before bring spoon to mouth.

Gently tap the child's shoulder two or three times to say "sit down"



Talking & Eating



Object Cues

An object cue is another type of communication that a partner could use to let the child know what is expected.



Object cues can be used as a **receptive** tool at all levels, and for **expressive** communication once they have started understanding symbols.

Object Cues: Supporting Receptive Communication

An **object cue** is:

- a whole or part of an object
- used to refer to a person, place, object, or activity



The **purpose** of an object cue is to provide a concrete means of supporting:

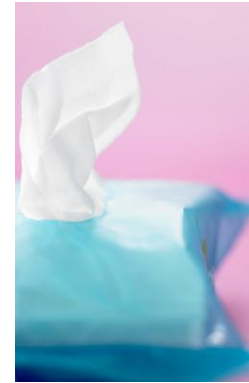
- conversational interactions
- communication
- language development
- Information
- reducing stress

Object Cues: Whole & Partial Objects



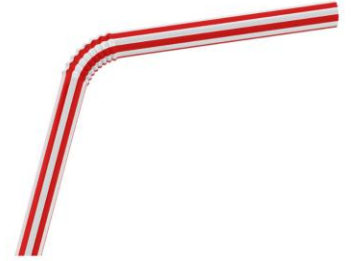
Example: Whole Object

- A cup is used to mean "Snack time, go to the snack area".
- A wet wipe is used to mean "Time for personal cares or toileting".
- A washcloth is used to mean "Time for a bath".
- Bubble wrapping is used to mean "Take a break".



Example: Parts of Object

- A section of a straw indicates "Snack time".
- A tab from a diaper indicates "Let's change your diaper".
- A piece of chain from the swing indicates "It's recess. Go play outside".
- A top of a plastic bottle is used to indicate "Lunch! Go to the table".
- A zipper is used to indicate "Time to get dressed".



Advantages of Using Object Cues

- **Object cues** provide a concrete and static representation that is easily understood.
- An **object cue** makes relatively low demands on the individual's cognition, memory, and representational skills.
- The size of the object may be reduced over time to a small part of the object to increase portability.



Disadvantages of Using Object Cues

- The use of **object cues** is not a conventional communication method; everyone who interacts with the individual may not use them consistently or in the same way.
- The use of whole objects may not be portable.
- Abstract and complex messages cannot be communicated solely through the use of **object cues**.
- Finding the appropriate object or part of an object to refer to a person, activity, or item can be very challenging.
- **Object cues** can easily be misplaced, lost, or damaged.

My Cue Dictionary

My Cue Dictionary

Student: _____

Touch or Object Cue	It is used to Communicate this MEANING...	My Partner will DO this...	What is Expected from ME...





Sadie's Family: Touch and Tactile Cues

Literacy and Communication

- **Communication, language, and literacy** are all **connected**.
- In typical development, literacy develops hand-in-hand with communication and language.
- Individuals who **need targeted intervention** for **expressive communication** development will similarly need **targeted intervention** for **developing literacy**.
- Exposure to books and printed materials is critical.



Tactile Books

Strategies to Help



Experience Books

Concept Books

Routine Books

Story Boxes

Quick Tips:

- They do NOT need to be fancy!
- Choose topics and objects that are meaningful to your child.
- Create it together with your child.
- Include text (print and/or braille) on every page.
- Have fun!



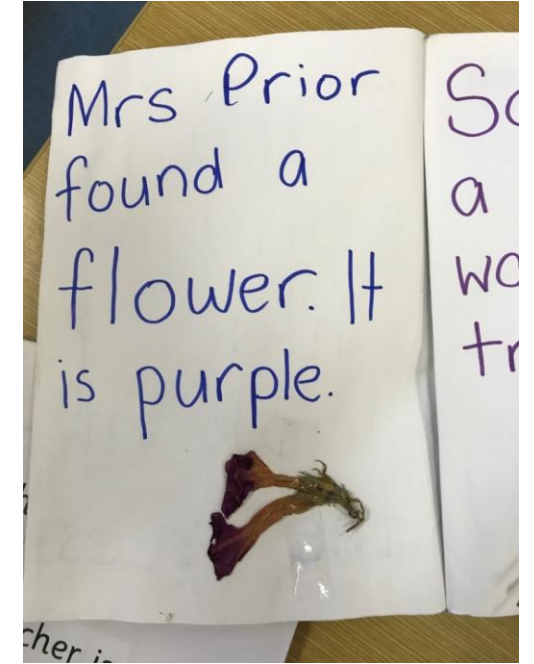
Experience Books

- Tell a story
- Are tied to specific language/communication
- Allow a child to share, re-create, and review the same story over and over again with many different people, whether at home or school
- Are the basis of conversation



Experience Books

- Represent day, event or activity
- Can be sequential
- Objects, partial objects or pictures
 - Leaf, stone, or twig from walk in park
 - Photo or drawing of saddle for horseback ride
 - Medical equipment child uses
- Help organize child's world
- Remember or rehearse
- Print or Braille can be added



Concept Books

Explain and reinforce ideas and concepts

- Animals, Familiar objects
- Actions, Colors, Shapes, Sizes
- Spatial relationships
- Letters and numbers
- Feelings and emotions



Book about fall

Routine Books

A book that organizes a student's day or an activity. Each step of the routine could be a page in the book.



Ideas for Tactile Books



- **Sensory Walk:** rocks, sticks, flowers, grass, leaves, bark, shells, gravel, etc.
- **Bath Time:** plug, washcloth, soap, towel
- **Making Pudding:** pudding box, wooden spoon, milk carton, napkin, etc.
- **Trip to McDonalds:** french fry box, hamburger wrapper, ketchup packet, drink lid, straw, napkin, etc.
- **Spoon Book:** wooden cooking, plastic cooking, slotted cooking, plastic coated for cooking in teflon pans, metal, grapefruit, teaspoon, iced teaspoon, tablespoon, measuring (plastic & metal), plastic (picnic), demitasse, etc.
- **Candy Book:** M&M, kisses, gummy bears, licorice, tootsie rolls, suckers, sugar babies, peppermint, etc.
- **Concept Books:** same & different, in & out, big & little, etc.

Additional Resource:

[Paths to Literacy](#)



Questions?