



Children's Therapy Team

Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

Supporting young children with complex needs at home using a Total Communication strategy

What is Total Communication?

Total Communication uses every available method to communicate. Your child or young person's (CYP) Speech and Language Therapist can suggest effective communication strategies and using this is a family's decision and can be discussed with their school

Total Communication in Action!

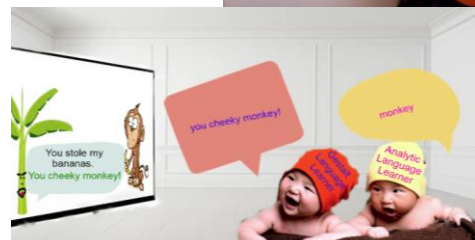
Below are some examples of Total Communication that can be used independently or alongside one another.

Gesture

Gestures are a non-verbal way to communicate, using our hands or body to deliver a message to express meaning, emotion and intention. Gestures include facial expressions, eye contact, pointing, fingers to represent numbers, actions, thumbs up, nodding or shaking our head and waving hello and goodbye, among others. Encourage your CYP to communicate through gestures by demonstrating these and responding to their gestures. Gestures can be part of your everyday routines such as pointing to the environment to encourage them to follow a point to share attention and support understanding of language.

Verbal speech and language

Speech and language are complex skills since being able to form sentences, the CYP needs to apply grammar rules, vocabulary and have the physical abilities to plan and produce speech and language. The CYP need us to adapt our speech and languages when they have difficulties and ensuring we consider their learning style.



Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

AAC includes both low-tech and high-tech communication systems. Low tech tools include pen and paper, word boards, photos and symbols, communication board and books and using real objects such as a fork to represent a lunchtime routine. High-tech includes sophisticated computer systems such as mobile devices, tablets and laptops that may have applications, buttons or pages that enable spoken messages when touched. These strategies can support or replace spoken communication.



Sign language & Makaton

Sign languages, like British Sign Language and Japanese Sign Language, are often used by Deaf people and can also be used by hearing people to support language. Sign languages have distinct words and grammar too, requiring no speech. **Signing helps language develop - it doesn't hinder verbal language!** Makaton is a language-building program combining sign languages and spoken English to support effective communication. Makaton covers important functional signs caregivers may have chosen ("drink"), key words including objects, description and action words ("juice is all gone") and complex grammatically complete sentences.

Speech and language therapists and Makaton tutors can help you choose the right Makaton level. Links for signing resources: <https://makaton.org> & British-sign.co.uk

Note: Do not continue any of the advice if it is causing the child distress and seek professional advice when unsure. This is a generic advice sheet to help you get started or to help you remember key advice given to you by your Speech and Language Therapist.

If you have tried using these strategies and you are still concerned about the impact of your child's communication differences, you can:

- Look on our website for further information and advice: [York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust - Speech and language therapy \(yorkhospitals.nhs.uk\)](http://YorkandScarboroughTeachingHospitalsNHSFoundationTrust-Speechandlanguagetherapy(yorkhospitals.nhs.uk))
- Contact us via our 'Request for Help' line – see our website for further details