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An online information, sharing and community resource for individuals with disabilities, parents, carers and professionals

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## Communicating with children with disabilities

Communicating effectively is at the heart of delivering inclusive education. Here are a few tips on ways of communicating with and engaging pupils with disabilities

Communicating with children with disabilities may take longer than communicating with children without disabilities. Each child is different and may require a different method of communication. It is really important to get to know the child and work closely with their main support to understand what communication methods best suit the child.

Any child can actively engage in communication given access to the right communication method for them. Good 2-way communication means that you and the child can communicate effectively with each other. In identifying the best communication method it is really important to establish a positive environment that actively encourages and supports children to communicate in whatever means they are able.

There are a number of different communication methods that can be used to support and encourage children to communicate. For children without disabilities, these methods of communication are useful as they can be used to vary learning and promote understanding.

### Communication methods

- **Touch**

Tactile activities help children increase their fine motor skills, and they are a great way to communicate with children who have sight or hearing difficulties. Touch can help children build concepts as they link objects to experiences, for example in teaching weather or seasons you could use bowls of warm and cold water/ice allowing the children to put their hands in. You can illustrate stories by providing tactile materials related to elements of the story.

- **Art**

Art for children who are non-verbal or limited in verbal communication, it is a creative outlet. It is important to be clear there is no right or wrong way to do the art. The book "Ish" is a helpful tool to promote children's confidence in art. Use tactile materials such as clay, paint, play doh, recycled materials for collages and junk modelling.

- **Music**

Music enables children to express themselves and interact with others without using words. During difficult situations, it might be helpful to sing a song in order to help your child work through it or play a particular piece of music that enables them to feel relaxed.

- **Movement**

Movement enables children to express themselves and can be coupled with music to encourage children to increase their motor skills. Introducing movement can increase focus, attention and impulse control in children.

- **Social Stories**

Social stories offer a safe and accessible tool for children to develop an understanding of situations, feelings and behaviours. Give them the opportunity to explore how to respond.

- **Communication boards**

For children who need additional support in managing transitions during their day, creating a schedule with them using pictures can help them understand what activity is next on the schedule, making transitions easier.

- **Technology**

Technology offers a whole new way for children with special needs to communicate. I pads and tablets provide apps to enable

children to learn and engage in the world around them. Children who are nonverbal or have limits in verbal communication can type or use voice output devices.

- **Gestures**

Using gestures is a non-verbal way to communicate to a child with special needs. It can be particularly useful for children with hearing difficulties and children with limited verbal communication. Some children, particularly children on the autistic spectrum, might not notice gestures, so make sure the child is paying attention before using them. Always use verbal communication alongside gestures.

- **Sign Language**

Sign language offers a means of communication for children who have hearing difficulties and those who are non-verbal or find verbal communication difficult. Always, use verbal communication alongside signing to promote verbal communication. Children with hearing difficulties, providing there is no medical reason can be supported to develop the ability to speak though will need you to sign back to understand what you are saying.

- **Motivators**

All children respond well to encouragement and praise. Giving small, appropriate rewards such as stickers, badges can help children with special needs feel motivated to complete a difficult task or get through a challenging social situation. This can be applied to your whole class.

- **Transition Time**

Children with special needs may find transitions between activities difficult. It is important to allow enough time and support to children to make a positive transition. To enable children to make positive transitions be clear about the activities and expectations of the day (present this in a way that is understood by all children in the class) and give indications of the upcoming transition such as "5 minutes".

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