



The following is a transcript of audio segments for slides in this lesson.

Lesson 2

Facilitating People to Communicate their Messages

What you will learn

In this lesson, you will learn general tips to facilitate communication between a person with a communication disability and another person if they communicate by using a letter board, a picture or symbol board, a communication device, or if they have unclear speech, or difficulty finding the words that they want to say. You will also learn what to do if you don't understand a message.

It's important to remember that everyone is different and most people use a variety of ways to communicate. Before you assist anyone with communication, you should find out how the person communicates and what they want you to do in facilitating their communication.

Slide 3 – Tips for Assisting a Person Who Uses a Letter Board

When assisting a person who uses a letter or alphabet board, it's a good idea to ask if they have written instructions on how they use the board. Most people have instructions on the back of the board which will tell you what finger they use to select letters on the board, or whether they use a knuckle, a pointer like what Tony uses, or eye gaze. If there are no instructions then you should ask them to show you how they select the items on the board.

Find out how the person communicates Yes and No if it's not obvious. They might use speech, they might nod, or shake their head, and some people might have more personalized signals like looking up for Yes and looking down for No. Once you find out how the person signals Yes and No you can proceed to ask questions about how they communicate and what they want you to do.

Find out if the person uses any gestures or body language that you should know about. For example, they may want you to know that they look down at their board, or they lift their hand, or they lift their leg if they want to communicate something. They might have a quick signal to tell you that they need to take a break.

Find out where they keep the board and if you can get it for them. Never dig into a person's bag without asking permission. Ask where should sit when facilitating their communication

because some people may have difficulty controlling their movements and may be very concerned about hitting you if you sit in the wrong place and they may want you sit in an area where you can best see what they are pointing to on the board. Ask if they want you to hold their board in place when they are using it. There is nothing more frustrating when a board is slipping around on the surface. Some people will want their board on a table, and others may want to have it on a tray on their wheelchair.

If a person is in a wheelchair be very careful not to touch it, lean on it, put your feet on the wheels, or hang on to the handles, as a wheelchair is a person's personal space and if you do need to touch it, or the bag, always ask permission.

Slide 4 – More Tips for Assisting a Person Who Uses a Letter Board

Some people, like Ann, will want you to say each item out loud when they point to the letters. That way they are sure that you have understood what they have selected. Other people, like Tony, don't want you to do that. Tony prefers that you only say the word out loud after he has finished spelling it.

Ask if you could write down the letters and words being communicated as this will help you track and avoid asking the person to start again if you get lost and forget what they have communicated.

Make sure you know the signal that they will use to tell you that you have misinterpreted their message, and it's important to know if they want you to guess. Some people never want a person to guess. Others find it useful, especially if they know them very well, and some people compromise and want people to guess only after they have spelt at least three letters of a word. The golden rule about guessing is to ask the person what they want you to do, and it is always a good idea to read the full sentence at the end when somebody is finished communicating it and to confirm that this is correct and exactly what they wanted to communicate.

Slide 7 – Tips for Assisting a Person Who Uses Pictures and Symbols

In addition to finding out how a person communicates Yes and No, and how they use their device, or board, it's important to spend time with the person, getting to know them and their communication style. If they use a device like Gabe, find out whether they put items together into sentences or if they give key words, and want you to fill in the blanks and suggest different things that they may want to communicate. If they use a communication book, ask if you can look at it and familiarize yourself with how it's organized, for example, if you want to know about a specific person, it's useful to know where that person's vocabulary on people is kept in the communication book. With their permission, get suggestions from people who communicate well with them. They may be able to give you guidelines, and it may also be appropriate to ask if the person wants you to meet with their Speech Language Pathologist, or

Augmentative Communication Clinician, to get some specific strategies on ways to assist them with communication.

Slide 10 – Tips for Assisting Communication for a Person Who Uses a Device

- Stand or sit to the side of the person. Avoid looking over the person's shoulder unless they ask you to read the screen
- Wait for the person to finish their message. Do not interrupt or guess without permission. The person may want to finish spelling the whole word because their full sentence will not sound right on the device if the words are unfinished.
- Tell the person if you don't understand and if necessary, prompt them to repeat the message or ask if you can read the screen on the device

Slide 13 – Tips for Assisting Communication for a Person Who has Unclear Speech

- Reduce or eliminate any background noise and distractions
- Tell the person if you don't understand what they are saying
- Ask the person what they do when not understood
- Ask the person if they can repeat the word, slow down, say it in a different way, spell or write it down, point to a picture or type it on a device
- Ask the person to tell you what they are communicating about and then guess what they might be saying

Slide 15 – Tips for Assisting a Person Who has Difficulty Finding the Words They Want to Say

Try to find out the topic. Ask if they are talking about a person, if it's a place, if it's a thing, then write down or say two to three options within that, for example, if it's a person, then suggest the names of some people. Show photographs or pictures, or you can even draw pictures. You may want to use some diagrams, maps, calendars and even objects.

Slide 16 – Tips for When You Don't Understand a Message

It is inevitable when there will be times when you will not understand what the person is communicating. This is okay. You shouldn't take it personally. The main thing is to take the time to work with the person to find possible solutions. For example, you could try to back track. Tell the person everything you understand so far in the message. Try to establish the topic or the context and if the person can't give that to you, then suggest what you think the topic might be. You could ask the person to start over or repeat the word that you didn't understand. If after three attempts at repetition, and you still don't understand, you might suggest that the person tell you another way. For example, they could choose to use different words, or they could choose to use a different communication method.

If they are speaking, you could politely ask them if they could spell the word, or write it down, point to letters on a board, or show you a picture of what they are talking about. You could ask the person to give you some clues. Gabe gives clues to Christine for the word 'contract'. He

communicates that it's about paper, writing and signing his name and she is able to guess with those clues.

Sometimes what the person is trying to communicate is very important, other times it may not be. It's a good thing to take your time and do your best to understand. But if you still don't understand, ask if it's important, and if it is then you could ask if there is anyone that you could contact to help you understand what the person is communicating, or the person might want to take a break and come back to it at a later time, or they may want to drop it entirely and change the subject.

Slide 17 – The Communication Assistance Questionnaire

We have compiled many of the questions in this lesson into a form that you can download from the resource file. You can use the form to find out how a person wants you to assist with communication. You should ask the person if they want to keep the form after you have completed it, or if you should keep it, so that you can refer to it if you assist that individual at another time.