



COMMUNICATION SUPPORTS

FORMAL, SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATORS

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Agenda

Communication supports for people who speak, use pictures, symbols, letter board or a communication device in all decision-making situations in the areas of:

- Identifying Communication Support Needs
- Understanding Information
- Expressive Communication
- Assistance with Options, Preferences and Decision Making

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Identifying Communication Supports

- Practices to Identify Communication Support Needs
- Communication Support Questionnaire
- Role of Support Person(s)

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Practices to Identify Needs

- Do not assume you know the supports that a person may need
- Request and document a person’s communication support needs
- Allow extra time for communicating
- Arrange to meet in a quiet space
- Slow down and be patient
- As you continue to interact with the individual, you may identify specific support needs



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Communication Passport

- Written information about how a person communicates.
- Instructions on what you can do to make communication go smoothly.
- Communication supports that person may require.
- See Supplemental Resources for information about developing communication passports.



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Communication Support Questionnaire

Questionnaire elicits information about:

- How a person communicates
- Role of support person(s), if any
- Accommodations and supports for:
 - Scheduling a meeting
 - Understanding spoken and written information
 - Expressive communication, completing and signing forms
 - Making decisions



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Identify the Role of Accompanying Person(s)

- Do not assume that an accompanying person is a support person or a substitute decision maker.
- Support Person Agreement that assigns specific roles to people in their personal network (see supplemental resources).
- Find out if the accompanying person has a role to:
 - Assist with communication
 - Assist with decisions
 - Listen and take notes
 - Provide moral support
- Discuss privacy issues and the need for a confidentiality agreement.



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Comprehension Support

- Do not assume that everyone who has a communication disability requires support to understand what you are saying.
- A person may have:
 - a disability that affects how they process and understand spoken language.
 - limited life experiences.
 - limited knowledge about an issue being discussed
- Important to check comprehension.



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Areas of Support

- Practices that you can use to support comprehension
- Visual tools to support comprehension for spoken information
- Communication assistance for comprehension.
- Accessible reading materials



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Comprehension Practices

- Speak in a way that the individual understands.
- Use clear, everyday language.
- Use short sentences.
- Slow your rate of speaking.
- Pause between sentences to give person time to process.
- Chunk information into manageable bits.
- Frequently review information and check for understanding.
 - Ask the person to tell you what they understand so far
 - Ask forced alternative questions – are we talking about...or ...?
 - Ask yes and no questions – are we talking about a nursing home?
 - Ask questions in the same way – is this about surgery? Are we discussing surgery



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Visual Tools for Comprehension

- Show visuals when speaking.
- Objects
- Written key words, diagrams, maps
- Illustrations
- Context picture boards and social story books
- Refer to supplemental resources in the handouts



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Comprehension Assistance

- A support person can assist an individual to understand by:
 - Checking comprehension
 - Flagging language that may be too complex
 - Rephrasing information in ways the individual understands
 - Relating information to the person's lived experience
- Using appropriate visual support tools
- Reading and explaining written information



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Accessible Reading Materials

- Ask if person requires assistance to read and / or understand written documents
- Provide Plain Language Documents
 - Simplified language and grammar
 - Short sentences
 - Key information
 - Minimal punctuation
 - Clear font and layout
 - Illustrations that augment meaning
- Plain language applies to information documents, forms, brochures, agreements, contracts in hard copy, digital and websites.
- See handouts for resources.

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Expressive Communication

- People may require supports to express what they want to communicate if they:
 - Speak in ways that is difficult for you and others to understand
 - Do not have the words or the language to express what they want to say
 - Have little or no speech and need a way to communicate
 - Cannot write to complete and sign forms

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Expressive Communication Supports

- Practices to facilitate expressive communication
- Expressive Communication aids and tools
- How a support person can assist with expressive communication

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Practices to Support Expressive Communication

- Find out how the person wants to communicate
- If they use a communication aid, ensure they have access to it at all times
- Ask what you should do when communicating with them
- Ask one question at a time
- Use open-ended questions
- Give opportunities for the person to respond and communicate what they want to say
- Tell the individual if you do not understand them



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Expressive Communication Aids and Tools

- Used by the individual for daily communication
 - Pen and paper / Boogie boards
 - Letter boards
 - Picture / symbol Boards
 - Tablets , smart phone
 - Speech output devices
- Topic boards for specific contexts
- Speech Language Pathology and Augmentative Communication Services



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Expressive Communication Assistance

Communication Assistant:

- conveys messages that are generated, directed and approved by the person being supported

Proxy Communicator or Advocate:

- conveys what they think the person wants or what they think is in the best interest of the individual



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Expressive Communication Assistance

When assisting with communication, a support person may:

- Explain how individual communicates
- Communicate what the individual has generated or directed them to convey
- Echo the person's messages
- Reformulate a person's incomplete messages
- Verify intended meanings of messages

When assisting with communication a support person should not:

- Persuade or influence the individual's communication in any way.
- Speak on behalf of an individual unless directed by the individual to do so.

Engage an impartial, qualified Speech-Language Pathologist if there is evidence of:

- Conflict of interest, undue persuasion, coercion, or abuse of power.



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Decision-Making Support

- Do not assume that everyone who has a communication disability requires support to make a decision.
- Like everyone, they have a right to choose to get assistance to make decision.
- Assistance to make a decision may be called supported decision-making, co-decision making, or shared decision making.
- Assistance to make a decision does not have to be a legal arrangement.
- Supported or assisted decisions making is legally recognized in some Canadian jurisdictions.



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Decision-Making and Communication

- Decision-Making is a communication process.
- Decision-Making involves understanding issues relating to the decision, considering options and consequences, and expressing a decision.
- Depending on the needs of the individual and the decision to be made, it may address one or more areas of:
 - reduced life experiences.
 - reduced past and ongoing impact of communicating preferences and decisions.
- Specific executive functions of problem-solving, organizing thoughts, self-awareness and regulation, sequencing and planning of events, weighing up pros and cons, considering risks and safety issues.



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Decision-Making Support

- Be clear about the decision to be made.
- Ensure communication supports are in place (if required)
- Brainstorm and keep track of options and consequences on a white board.
- Listen to the individual’s questions, concerns, preferences and decisions
- Honor or negotiate how best to honor the person’s preference / decision

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Role of Support Person(s)

Positive outcomes are linked to decision-supports who:

- Know the individual well
- Recognize the person’s right to autonomy, right to take risks, to make choices and decisions
- Input from a Speech-Language Pathologist, if required
- Use a collaborative approach, when required

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Speech Language Pathology Services

In some situations, an impartial, qualified Speech-Language Pathologist is required.

- The individual needs support and tools beyond your experience, training and abilities
- There is no trusted person to assist with communication
- There is a perceived conflict of interest between the individual and their support person(s)
- There is evidence of coercion, persuasion or abuse of power
- The decision has serious consequences such as in medical assistance in dying or when communicating in a police, legal or justice setting

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Policies, Practices and Documentation

Policies, practices and documentation that complies with the duty to accommodate legislation and Article 12 in the UNCRPD.

- Use the checklist provided in the handouts to document:
- Individual's communication support needs
- How and when these supports were provided
- How informed decisions were made and by whom


