

Communication Development for Complex Learners

AN INTRODUCTION



What is communication

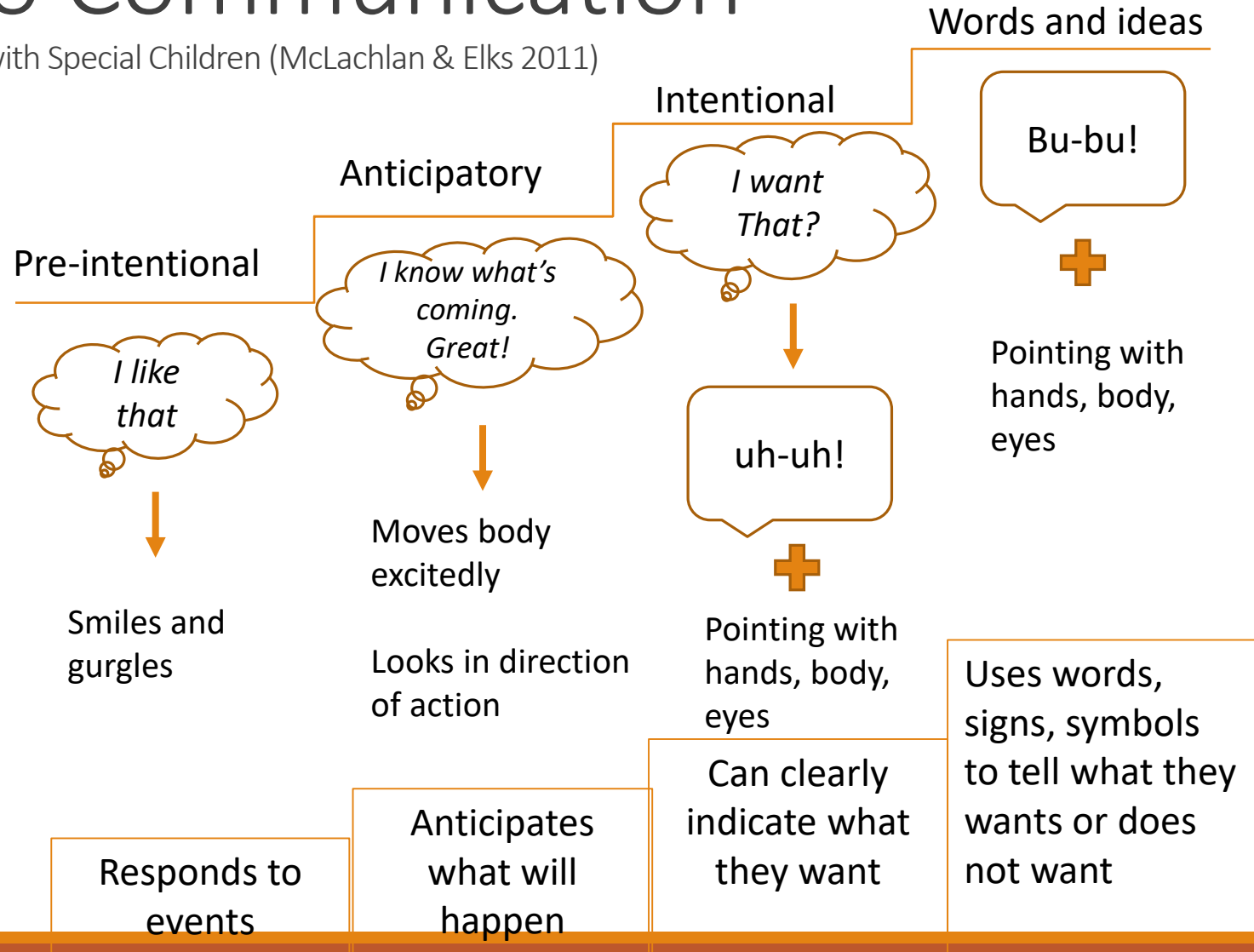
- Involves the giving, receiving and exchanging of information by any appropriate communication method
- Two-way process, requires someone to 'speak' and someone to 'listen' and respond
- Total communication
 - Is about the best way of communicating with an individual
 - This may not be the same for all the children or young people
 - Forms part of everyday life and/or curriculum

Your children..

- Want to communicate about the same things as everyone else – their feelings, their needs, their likes and dislikes
- But we need to be more flexible and creative in the *form* of communication that we accept
- Whilst we may use words (spoke or written), alongside gestures, facial expression etc, this is most likely not the case for your young person. Your child may be more individual in the way they communicate which can make it difficult for unfamiliar people to understand what they are 'saying'
- Their communication may be described as pre-verbal, i.e. what happens before spoken words develop

Steps to Communication

Taken from Let's Talk with Special Children (McLachlan & Elks 2011)



Steps to Communication

Level of Communication	WHAT is communication	HOW is it communicated	Interaction skills	Play skills
Pre-intentional	Basic and usually automatic responses to changes either in the body or in the immediate surroundings. Response signals are: Like/dislike/wanting	Simple noises or movements e.g. crying, vocalising, smiling, becoming still	Can focus either on a person or object	Explores objects e.g. by mouthing, looking, touching

Steps to Communication

Level of Communication	WHAT is communication	HOW is it communicated	Interaction skills	Play skills
Intentional	Purposeful 'messages' without words e.g. It's gone (disappearance) More (recurrence) Stop (rejection) Mine (possession) I want to.... (agent) It's nice/horrid (comment)	Wide range of non-verbal communication e.g. vocalisation, facial expression, hand gestures, whole body movements	Is dependent on the other person responding to their message as if it has real meaning. Likes turn-taking and repetitive games. Develops joint attention	Further exploration leads to understanding of and playing with everyday objects

Steps to Communication

Level of Communication	WHAT is communication	HOW is it communicated	Interaction skills	Play skills
Words and ideas	Simple words to: name things, request things, ask for more and expand on messages above.	Initially uses non-verbal communication but gradually learns words or uses signs/symbols	Needs adult to respond to their communication and provide models of language. Can initiate. Interactions have 1-2 turns	Can use several objects are once. Enjoys sorting. Can play with large doll objects and related these to self/another person

Fundamentals of Communication (Dave Hewitt 2012)

- Learning about the significance of closeness and sharing personal space
- Learning to give, extend and share attention with another person
- Learning how to have fun with other people – learning how to play
- Learning how to take turns in exchanges of behaviour
- Learning to use and understand eye contact and facial expressions
- Learning to use and understand physical contact within social interactions
- Learning about non-verbal communication such as gesture and body language
- Learning to use and understand vocalisations, developing more varied and extensive vocalisations that gradually become more precise and meaningful
- Learning to regulate and control emotional responses and arousal levels (Nind & Hewitt, 1994; 2005)

Remember!

We can all exchange a great deal of information without using words....about 90%!

Sounds – vocalisations e.g. grunts/ahhs, lip smacking, clapping, foot tapping

Vision –facial expressions, eye contact, gesture, body language, uncontrolled non-conscious information coming out of a person

Touch, physical contact – handshakes, hugs, high 5s, strokes, pats, taps, tickles, squeezes

Smell – this is less obvious but we do pick up olfactory information from each other e.g. perfumes, aftershaves, air fresheners, food smells etc

All these channels can be used as means of exploring and developing non-verbal communication with your children

Useful strategies or approaches

- **Communication passports (known in school as well-being passports)**
 - A document which describes how your child communicates and what is important information about them
- **Intensive interaction**
 - An approach to developing enjoyable interaction and communication your child and the people around them.
- **Cause and effect (e.g. switches)**
 - Way of helping your child understand that their actions have consequences; that they can make things happen.
 - Learning to make things happen can be seen as a step on the way to making things happen by communicating with other people.
- **Objects of Reference**
 - Using an object to represent a particular activity or event. These can be used to highlight what is going to happen next or to give a choice.

Help available

If you need additional help or support to develop your young person's communication at home please contact your class teacher or myself:

- Shelley Soni (Speech and Language Therapist)

Good luck 😊