

# Communication Strategies for Complex Learners

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WHAT CAN I DO AT HOME – PRE-INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION

# Steps to Communication

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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

# Pre-Intentional Communication

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What to look for:

- Movements/reactions that indicate likes and dislikes or want/don't want
- Response to or awareness of familiar situations compared to unfamiliar situations
- Vocalisations
- Smiles, laughs – signs of enjoyment
- Cries, grimaces – signs of displeasure

NB: By interpreting and responding consistently to your child's signals over time these may become more intentional messages

# Pre-intentional Communication – the messages

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## THE MESSAGE

1. I like this...
2. I don't like this...
3. I've finished

## HOW TO RESPOND

1. Support your child to explore it further
2. Remove it, allow a pause then re-offer to see if response is the same. If so, remove and offer something else.
3. Change how activity is being delivered/explored e.g. if using massager on hands try a different body part. If message is unchanged, stop activity and allow rest or change

# Pre-Intentional Communication – key points

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Use activities that are multi-sensory i.e. use eyes, ears, nose, hands and taste (if safe to do so). This will give your child multiple opportunities to learn and develop new skills.

Pause and watch to see how your child reacts and responds to different things, remember this could take a long time.

Try to respond to their attempts to communicate in the same way each time

Respond to attempts to communicate as if they were deliberate, this helps your child learn that their actions have consequences and can be meaningful i.e. giving them more of what they like and stopping what they don't

Developing intentional communication - YouTube



# Developing Anticipation

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- As routines or activities are repeated many times e.g. mealtimes, bath-times, your child may gradually start to learn what happens next...they anticipate.
- This might be characterised by smiling and happy sounds when they hear the bath running, smell the bath bubbles and you start to undress them
- This is important because it shows that your child is remembering things and links certain cues with particular activities. These reactions can be to things they like and dislike.
- Try to set up as many 'routines' as possible throughout your day to help your child understand what is happening and enable them to show you "I know what is going to happen"
- When focusing on activities, anticipation might be seen during ready steady go games, your child might still or become very animated in expectation for the interaction e.g. tickles, bouncing, blowing raspberries
- Intensive interaction strategies will encourage the development of anticipation
- Remember to pause and allow your child time to respond and process what is happening

# Anticipation – what to look for:

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- Moving in consistent ways before an event occurs to indicate likes, dislikes, wants. This could be a stilling or an increase in movement
- Responses to different facial expressions or tones of voice
- Changes in vocalisations
- Copying vocalisations or mirroring voice patterns
- May start an interaction by smiling/vocalising when a favourite person approaches



Encouraging interaction (2) - Amber - YouTube



# Visual activities

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- Mobiles or activity centres
- Mirrors
- Shiny paper or material
- Light-up toys
- Revolving night lights
- Bubbles
- Balloons
- Torches through coloured material/paper
- Things that glitter
- Place object where it can be seen and/or reached
- Give your child time to reach for/explore item
- Respond to whether they indicate preference, displeasure, or disinterest
- Say something about the activity using a few simple words or repetitive phrases. Be consistent
- Move objects side-to-side or up and down to develop tracking skills

# Touch activities

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- Rhymes – e.g. Round the garden
- Tickles – remember to change where you tickle and how long they have to wait for the tickle
- Touch mats and sensory exploration boards
- Vibration activities – e.g. massagers, vibrating cushions or snake
- Massage
  - You can use oil or cream to add additional aroma to experience
  - Vary pressure i.e. light/firm – watch for any preferences
  - Vary speed – watch for any preferences
  - Introduce materials with a light touch e.g. feathers, silks and move them over different parts of the body

# Touch activities

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- Water play
  - Bath-time is a winner but you can also use a paddling pool or bowl, remember to supervise at all times.
  - Explore temperatures and responses to warm/cold
  - Explore reactions e.g. add a bath bomb
  - Explore textures e.g. use gelli baffle to change consistency
  - Use bath toys e.g. watering cans to trickle water at different speeds on different parts of the body
  - Use your bath bubbles (make sure you have plenty) to blow them or clap/splat them in your hands or your child's

[Intensive interaction: Callum - WITH COMMENTARY - YouTube](#)



# People play – intensive interaction

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- Watching
  - Peepo – cover your face with your hands or material, will your child reach to remove the covering
  - Looking in a mirror and changing your facial expression
- Movement
  - Rocking e.g. row your boat – vary speed to look for changes in reactions
  - Bouncing e.g. horsey horsey – vary speed/force to look for changes in reaction
  - Dancing
  - Swinging, this can be in your arms if your child is light enough or on a large sheet with another person
- Turn-taking
  - Copy their actions and wait for a response

NB: always make sure you are at eye level with your child, use their name to gain their attention.

[Intensive interaction: Jordan - WITH COMMENTARY - YouTube](#)



# Hearing activities

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- Music
  - Play different styles of music and watch for responses
  - Explore different volumes and speeds when playing instruments
  - Support exploration and demonstration of different musical instruments
  - Sing different action songs e.g. baby shark, hokey cokey, happy and you know it
  - For older students use party action songs e.g. superman song, Macarena
- Explore noisy toys e.g. spinners, laughing balls, music boxes



# Help available

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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 😊