



Lesson 1: Communication and communication difficulties

Communication is how people connect and create understanding together. When we communicate, we continuously send signals to each other. We work together as communication partners to build a shared understanding.

Communication is:

- Essential to all aspects of life
- A human right.

Different types of communication	Description	Examples
<p>Unaided communication</p>	<p>Communication that uses a person’s own abilities without using equipment. This may include using speech, facial expression, gestures, or sign language.</p>	
<p>Aided communication</p>	<p>Communication that uses equipment to assist communication. Communication aids are an example of aided communication.</p>	

Communication problems happen between two or more people. The environment and communication partners can contribute to communication problems. Communication problems often happen when there is a lot of background noise. Communication problems can frequently be resolved using different types of aided and unaided communication.

People who experience communication difficulties

People who have difficulties with communication find it harder to communicate in different environments, not just noisy ones.

They may experience:

- Difficulties using speech
- Difficulties using and understanding speech.

People with these communication difficulties can be described as having communication support needs. Communication assistive products may help.

People who may benefit from communication assistive products include people experiencing:

- Difficulties with speech - some people’s speech can only be understood by people who are close to them.
- Difficulties using speech - for example, some people with autism may have difficulty using speech when they feel anxious.
- Difficulties using and understanding speech - for example, some people who have had a stroke.

Children who do not develop their ability to use speech and/or fully understand the speech of other people may also benefit from communication assistive products.

Impact of communication difficulties

People with communication difficulties can have problems:

- Creating and maintaining relationships
- Participating in activities they want or need to do.

Warning




People with communication difficulties may also be more vulnerable to abuse, assault and neglect. This is because they may be less able to use speech to defend themselves, persuade people to be kind, and report incidents when they happen.




Communication tips

Tip	People with speech difficulties	People who have difficulties understanding speech
Take your time	Allow plenty of time for the person to speak.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak slowly • Speak in shorter sentences • Leave plenty of time for the person to respond.

Tip	People with speech difficulties
Ask questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask them about the different ways they communicate. • Involve family members if needed, with the person's permission.
Listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may need to put more effort into listening to understand what a person is saying. • Observing the different ways a person uses to communicate may help. For example, facial expression and gestures.
Keep trying	Keep exploring ways to involve the person in conversation and decision making.

Lesson 2: Communication assistive products

Communication aids included in TAP		
		
Universal communication board	Customized communication book	Communication application (app) on smartphone and/or tablet

Communication aids not included in TAP			
	Image pending		
E-tran (eye-transfer) frames	Environment supports	Eye gaze systems	Switch systems

Lesson 3: How to carry out a communication screen


The TAP communication screen is a simple process to find out if a child or adult has a communication difficulty which affects their ability to participate in daily life. The TAP communication screen helps identify whether a person:

- Should be referred to a rehabilitation service or health professional for assessment
- May benefit from communication aids that are included in TAP.


Abilities

First ask the person questions to find out about their communication abilities and the way they express themselves. This helps involve the person in the screening process.


- Describe any difficulties the person has with their speech
- Identify other ways the person uses to communicate.

If it is difficult to communicate with the person, ask if a family member or caregiver can interpret. If you still have difficulty including the person in the conversation  refer the person to a rehabilitation service and continue with the screen. A communication aid may help.

Hearing

People who have hearing difficulties (including people who are Deaf) can still benefit from using communication aids. Check whether the person is in contact with a hearing service. If not, with their permission  Refer to an ear and hearing professional. Continue with the screen. A communication aid may help.

Vision

If the person is unable to see a communication aid even when wearing spectacles, with their permission  refer to a rehabilitation service and stop screening.

It is possible to use a communication aid without vision, but this requires specialist solutions and skills which are not included in TAP.

Refer

- Refer adults and children who have an unexplained change in their speech
- Refer any child using very limited or different speech compared to other children of the same age, if they have not been assessed by a health professional.

Complete the communication screen. A communication aid may help.

Impact of speech and understanding on daily life

A person may benefit from communication support if their difficulties using speech or understanding of speech affects their ability to:

- Create and maintain relationships
- Participate in activities they want to do or need to do.

If a person answers yes to either, a communication aid may help.

Environment

When considering which type of communication aid may be suitable, ask if the person has access to electricity to keep a smartphone or tablet charged at home or at work.

Lesson 4: Plan

Other assistive products

During the communication screen, ask the person if they have difficulties in other areas, such as in vision, hearing, mobility, self care, or cognition (thinking and/or remembering).

Next steps

- **Assess:** If a person may benefit from one or more of the communication aids available at your service, continue to assess for communication aids.
- **Refer** a person to:
 - A rehabilitation service if you have difficulty including the person in the conversation (after requesting family member / caregiver to interpret)
 - A health professional for an unexplained change in speech, or a significant delay in speech development
 - An ear and hearing professional if they cannot hear people speaking
 - An eye health professional if the person cannot see the communication aid.
- **Screen** a person for other assistive products if they have needs in other areas.
- **Follow up** if the person will return for an assessment for communication aids on another day.