



# Hearing the “voice” of the child

Eithne (Eth-na) Staunton

**Registered Managers Forum**

**31<sup>st</sup> July 2023**

# Focus point

What needs to happen to ensure the voices of children with disabilities and complex health needs are listened to and heard, and their rights are respected and upheld?





# Children with disabilities have the same rights as non-disabled children

Can you name any, type in the chat box

- to affection, love and understanding
- to education and full opportunity for play and recreation
- to say what they think when adults are making decisions that affect them and have their views listened to
- to meet together and join organisations
- to privacy
- support to lead full and independent lives
- to relax and play and join in a wide range of activities

# How do we ensure communication is at the core

*“The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them” Ralph Nichols (Listening & Learning)*

**Always start from the assumption that all children and young people can and do communicate**

When we talk about **children and young people’s voice**, it’s important to recognise that we’re talking **about all communication**. There can be a danger that we only listen to those who can easily tell us their views and therefore don’t deliver services that meet the needs of children and young people who have a range of support needs.

**There are many ways to support children to communicate their needs and Children with profound disabilities have the potential to initiate, respond and to make choices when given the right support and tools to do so.**

**What methods of communication do you currently use in your home ?**

# How do we ensure communication is at the core

## Methods of communication

- **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)**, refers to the use of objects, symbols, charts, photographs, signing and electronic aids to help a child communicate.
- **Gestures** including body language, facial expressions and eye pointing.
- **Formal signing systems** such as Makaton, Signalong and British Sign Language.
- **Symbol support**, including paper-based communication tools such as Talking Mats or communication passports and boards.
- **Voice output** communication aids.
- **Intensive Interaction** is a practical approach to interacting with people with learning disabilities who do not find it easy communicating or being social.
- **Music** is understood by all people across the world. Music can provide endless opportunities for learning and development. For nonverbal children, music is a way to express themselves and interact with others without using words.
- **Social Stories** developed by Carol Gray, are visual or written guides to describe different situations which could include skills, social interactions, or behaviours. Social stories help children manage social situations. For those children who struggle with transitions during their day, creating a schedule using pictures can help them understand what activity is next on the schedule, making transitions easier.

# How do we ensure communication is at the core

## Methods of communication

### Visual Communication – why it's essential?

We see and use visual prompts every day, for example road signs, maps and shopping lists. They help us to function, to understand the world around us, and provide us with valuable information.

### It's worth knowing that

- Your brain is WIRED to make sense of an image in **milliseconds**, compare that with the rate of the person talking or your reading speed.
- Retention of verbal presentations are 10%. You can achieve almost **50%** retention by combining your presentation with visual messages.
- Presenters who work with VISUAL aids are **TWICE** as likely to achieve the audience objectives as those who don't.
- Our visual sense accounts for **at least 75%** of all inputs received by our brains, equivalent to three out of every four people in the room being able to see what you communicate, not hear it.

# How do we ensure communication is at the core

## Methods of communication

### Visual Communication – why it's essential?

*"I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me...when somebody speaks to me, words are instantly translated into pictures..."* Visual Thinking: The Hidden Gifts of People Who Think in Pictures, Patterns, and Abstractions Temple Grandin 2021

Many people with Autism are thought to be visual learners, so presenting information in a visual way can help to encourage and support their communication, language development and ability to process information. It can also promote independence, build confidence and raise self-esteem.

# How do we ensure communication is at the core

- We need to really get to know the children and young people that we are working with and the communication systems they use
- We need to give children and young people enough time to communicate – processing time
- We need to be willing to learn from the child or young person about how they prefer to communicate and take the time to understand what we can do to support that child and the barriers to that child's communication
- We need to give children and young people clear, simple and accessible information in a format that best works for them – no jargon
- We must not make assumptions about what a child or young person is saying - check that you have understood (*The Communication Trust, 2011*), (*Participation Works, 2008*).

# How do we ensure communication is at the core

- **Acknowledging** that all behaviour is a form of communication and has a purpose.

The four functions of behaviour are to

- seek attention
- to avoid or escape a situation
- to get something we want
- sensory stimulation.

Positive behavioral support (PBS) is evidence-based strategies to improve quality of life and decrease behaviors than may challenge. It teaches new skills and alternative responses to replace the behaviors than may challenge. This approach is positive, proactive and focuses on preventing behaviors that challenging before they occur.

# How do we ensure communication is at the core

- Ensuring the children and young people have access to independent effective Advocacy

Advocacy is a way of empowering the children and young people and can help them to understand their rights and the choices they have. They can help assist them to speak up about the care they receive.

**Reflection: Can Registered Managers and residential care staff be advocates for the children/young people ?**



## Small group work

### **In your homes:**

- How are we eliciting the voice of the child in situations where parents, carers and other professionals are very vocal about their needs?
- How are we responding to what the child or young person tells us? For example, are we developing an action plan which ensures the child or young person is adequately protected

**NOMINATE ONE PERSON TO TAKE NOTES AND  
FEEDBACK**



## What else is needed?

- Staff training is essential, and we need to ensure it is good quality, effective pragmatic training
- Asking the children/young person, involving them in how they express their views
- Work in partnership with other professionals, Reg 44, social workers – how effective is their communication with the children/young people ?
- Value, respect, time
- Patience
- Positivity
- Active listening and hearing
- Reflective practice

ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

# Resources

- **Triangle** is an independent organisation provide specialist services for children and young people up to age 30, across the UK. They particular expertise with very young children and those with complex communication needs arising from impairment or trauma. [Resources | Triangle](#) **Two Way Street Intro video** [Two Way Street Intro | Triangle](#)
- **How it is. image vocabulary** <https://www.triangle.org.uk/files/2017-05/how-it-is-2002-an-image-vocabulary-for-children.pdf>
- [Online wellbeing for children with SEND | NSPCC](#) – NSPCC partnered with **Ambitious about Autism** to bring online wellbeing tips, specifically for parents and carers of children with SEND.
- **Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2021): ‘Stop, look and listen to me: engaging children and young people with severe learning disabilities’** [Stop, Look and Listen to me \(challengingbehaviour.org.uk\)](#) & [Positive Behaviour Support - Challenging Behaviour Foundation](#)
- [Objects of reference - Sense](#)
- **Animal talk’ activity: using animal pictures to get to know children and discuss their views and feelings**  
This tool contains 24 pictures of various animals and suggestions how they can be used to get to know children and discuss their views and feelings in an interactive and fun way. The resource is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at [www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/animal-talk-activity-using-animal-pictures-get-know-children-discuss-views-feelings/](http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/animal-talk-activity-using-animal-pictures-get-know-children-discuss-views-feelings/)
- [Widgit Online](#) - You can use **Widgit Online** to create both print and interactive materials from a range of easy-to-use templates or from scratch using our intuitive document writer

# How do we ensure communication is at the core

## Methods of communication, examples of putting them into practice

**Communication Profile for each child/young people** which clearly identifies the method(s) used by the child to communicate. Each profile is based on the individual communication needs of the children and one size does not fit all. These are renewed as the children's preferred communication changes and develops.

**Visual Communication Notice Boards** - Each child has their own individual communication notice board on display in the main room of the home ( dining room, lounge for example).

**Children's Meetings** - The purpose of children's meetings is to help facilitate the sharing of information and to give children the opportunity to be involved in the day to day running of the home and therefore about the quality of their care.

**Children's Charter** - is a document developed with the children/ young people sets out what they expect when they stay in your home. It can be developed through consultation and the statements are the homes pledge to the quality and type of care/service you will provide the children.