

Communication and Challenging Behaviour

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Many people with learning disabilities have some difficulties with communication; this may be in understanding what other people are "saying" or in being able to express themselves. Challenging behaviour is very commonly associated with such difficulties and an understanding of the issues around communication may help to explain why challenging behaviour occurs. Improving communication may be helpful in reducing or preventing challenging behaviour.

People who have more severe learning disabilities are more likely to have more difficulties in communicating, and those people who have less communication skills seem more likely to have more frequent challenging behaviour. Communication is one of the most important ways in which we control our environment and influence other people. If a child's communication skills limit this control, frustration is likely and challenging behaviour may follow. If such behaviour is effective at getting what the child wants or needs, it may be more likely to occur again in the future.

All our information sheets are available to download free of charge because we believe that money should not be a barrier to getting the information you need, when you need it.

The CBF relies on the support of our friends and colleagues to continue to provide free resources to families.

Please see below for details of how to support us.

Common Communication Difficulties

Difficulties understanding

People may experience difficulties in understanding what other people are saying. Many people use the context and situation (for example, knowing what usually happens in that situation), rather than the actual words used, to make sense of what is expected of them.

Understanding skills are frequently overestimated. This may lead to confusions, for example, if someone doesn't know what they are being asked to do or if they receive the "wrong message". Difficulties in understanding may be exacerbated by unrecognised hearing loss. As the latter is very common in children and adults with learning disabilities it is very important to investigate this and, if possible, get treatment.

Abstract concepts (referring to things that cannot be seen or touched), negatives (e.g., "not" "don't"), and time concepts (e.g., "yesterday", "this afternoon") are particularly difficult to understand and may lead to people not receiving the intended message. For example,

*Teacher's Message - "Sam, you're **not** going in the car".*

Message understood by Sam - "I'm going out in the car".

*Sam does not understand "not" so thinks that he is going by car and becomes distressed when he realises he will have to walk. The message would have been clearer to Sam if the teacher had told him what he **was** going to do e.g., "Sam, you're going for a walk".*

People may also have difficulties because they are given too much language to process and are only understanding key words. Many people need to have information given to them in a simple structure. For example,

Mother 's Message - "Hannah, you can have a drink after you've tidied your room ".

Message understood by Hannah - "I'm having a drink and then tidying my room".

In English, what we say first is usually what we want the person to do first. Hannah becomes upset when she is expected to tidy her room and has not yet had her drink.

Another difficulty people may have is in interpreting language literally. We use many phrases whose intended meaning is not reflected in the actual words used. For example, if someone has done something that we find irritating we might say "Oh, that's great!", when we actually mean the opposite. Understanding the intended meaning of such communication requires attention to tone of voice, facial expression and body language. These may not be understood by the child.

Difficulties in sending messages

Many factors may contribute to the difficulties people with learning disabilities have in getting other people to understand them. The child may have difficulties in articulating speech or forming clear signs. They may lack the words necessary to convey the message they want to convey or they may use the right words but in the wrong order or without the appropriate supporting body language.

Such problems may be particularly crucial with certain sorts of messages. For example, indicating that an adult's request hasn't been understood, expressing a preference, letting someone know how you feel. If such important messages cannot be communicated, frustration is very likely and may lead to challenging behaviour. For example, *John is asked to go shopping. He is unable to tell people that he isn't in the mood to do this as he has had a busy morning. He would probably be happy to go after he has had a rest. He is unable to communicate these things and becomes upset and starts to scream when he is given his coat.*

What can be done?

It is essential to have a good understanding of the ways in which a particular child or adult communicates and of the ways in which information needs to be presented to them to facilitate their understanding. Challenging behaviour may be more likely to occur in situations where people either do not understand what is being expected or are unable to use communication to control their environment.

Other people need to make sure that they are communicating in a way that the person understands. This may include using simple, short sentences and trying to avoid saying something which could be misunderstood. Objects, pictures and symbols are particularly useful as ways of reminding people what will be happening throughout the day (being able to anticipate events is often important) and of supplementing spoken language, as is signed communication.

It is also important to respond consistently to what the person is trying to communicate (particularly when their means of communication is unclear). It may be possible to teach the individual an easier way of communicating e.g., by using visual communication. Additional vocabulary may need to be introduced e.g., teaching the person how to ask for a rest.

Communication interventions need to include all aspects of the individual's life and must include those people who regularly communicate to the person. This should include thinking about the communication issues overall and not just around situations where challenging behaviours may occur.

Please see information below for contact details of groups and organisations specialising in communication support.

General Communication information and support

- **Afasic:** A UK charity that aims to help children and young people affected by speech, language and communication impairments, their families and the professionals working with them. Their website also features lots of information sheets about speech and language impairments. For more information visit: www.afasic.org.uk, tel: 0845 355 5577 or contact via website.
- **Communication Matters:** A UK charity that supports people who find communication difficult because they have little or no clear speech. For more information visit: www.communicationmatters.org.uk, tel: 0845 456 8211 or email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk.
- **Find a Voice:** A UK based charity that provide advice and support to people with speech and communication difficulties, including information on obtaining funding. For more information visit: www.findavoice.org.uk, tel: 01233 634625 or contact via website.
- **Netbuddy:** Netbuddy is a website full of tips and ideas from family carers and professionals with experience of learning disability. They also have a section specifically dedicated to useful Apps that can be downloaded for the IPAD and iPhone. For more information visit: www.netbuddy.org.uk.
- **1 Voice:** A network and support for children and families caring for someone with communication needs. For more information visit: www.1voice.info, tel: 07943 618525 or email: info@1voice.info.
- **Talking Point:** A charity that provide advice and information for parents and carers of children with speech and language difficulties. For more information visit: www.talkingpoint.org.uk, tel: 0845 225 4071 or email: info@talkingpoint.org.uk.



Objects of Reference

- **Ace centre:** An organisation specialising in communication. They offer services in assessments, equipment loans, training and resources. For more information visit: www.ace-centre.org.uk, tel: 0161 358 0151 or email: enquiries@acecentre.org.uk.

Signing

- **Makaton:** Makaton is a language programme that uses signs and symbols to help people communicate. The Makaton charity aims to provide training, resources, advice and support to families/professionals. For more information visit: www.makaton.org, tel: 01276 606778 or email: family@makaton.org.
- **Signalong:** The Signalong Group is a registered charity that is dedicated to helping people with speech and language problems overcome difficulties by teaching a sign support system. For more information visit: www.signalong.org.uk, tel: 0845 4508422 or email: info@signalong.org.uk.

Visual Communication

- **ASD Visual Aids:** A company that supply visual products, which aim to support children,

young people and adults with communication and social difficulties. For example, Mood bands, stories for social situations and many other products that can be used either at school or home. For more information visit www.asdvisualaids.com, tel: 0800 622 6015 or email: info@visualaids.com.

- **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS):** PECS is an approach that uses pictures to develop communication skills. The following website provides basic information about PECS and gives details of PECS training workshops. For more information visit: www.pecs.org.uk, tel: 01273 609555 or email: pyramid@pecs.org.uk.
- **Talking Mats:** This is a communication tool, which uses a mat with symbols as a basis for communication. It is designed to help people with communication difficulties think about issues discussed with them and express themselves in a visual way.
- **Widgit Literacy Symbols:** This website offers information about Widgit literacy symbols, which aid understanding and communication for people who find reading difficult. For more information visit: www.widgit.co.uk, tel: 01926 333680 or email: info@widgit.com.

Voice Output Communication Aid (VOCA)

- **Liberator:** A company that provide communication products, aids, training and support. An example of this includes, Vantage Lite 2, which is a portable, lightweight communication aid that enables someone with no verbal communication skills to communicate. For more information visit: www.liberator.co.uk, tel: 01733 370470 or contact via website.

Communication Apps for IPAD and iPhone

- **Grid Player:** An app that helps people who cannot speak or who have limited speech. Sentences that you create are spoken out loud. For more information visit: www.itunes.com.
- **Icomm App:** A communication app dedicated to helping children with communication difficulties. As part of this app, you can record yourself saying “apple” to accompany the picture of an apple in the food category. Then when a child selects the picture of an apple they would hear your voice saying, “apple”. For more information visit www.itunes.com.
- **Tap to Talk:** A communication app that has been designed specifically for those who are non-verbal. This app involves tapping a particular picture to hear the app speak. For more information visit www.itunes.com.



Communication Passports

- **Personal Communication Passports:** A way of recording information about a child in an accessible and person-centered way. For more information visit: www.communicationpassports.org.uk, tel: 0131 651 6235 or contact via website.

Resource Packs

- **I want to Choose Too:** A guide that includes ideas, resources and tips for involving children with little or no speech in the community, at school, in the classroom and in relationships. To view this document visit: www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/profile.asp?guid=0307827a-626e-43a6-81d3-a12abab49f0d.
- **Supported Decision Making:** A guide that provides best practice techniques when

supporting someone with their decision making. It also contains a part about the importance of communication and how it must be supported. To view this document visit: www.paradigm-uk.org.

Multimedia Profiling

- **Multimedia Profiling:** A 21st century communication tool, an alternative language that enables people, through the use of video and computers, to gather and share information about their lives and the problems they face. For more information visit: www.acting-up.org.uk, tel: 020 8533 3344 or email info@acting-up.org.uk.

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The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

We are the charity for people with severe learning disabilities who display challenging behaviour. We make a difference to the lives of children and adults across the UK by:

- Providing information about challenging behaviour
- Organising peer support for family carers and professionals
- Giving information and support by phone or email
- Running workshops which reduce challenging behaviour

To access our information and support, call 01634 838739, email info@thecbf.org.uk, or visit our website: www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk

If you have found this information useful, please consider making a donation.

You can show your support at www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk

Make a £5 donation by texting Cbfd05£5 to 70070

Or email us to get involved at support_us@thecbf.org.uk