

Understanding Autism Communication systems

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PAEDIATRIC SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST

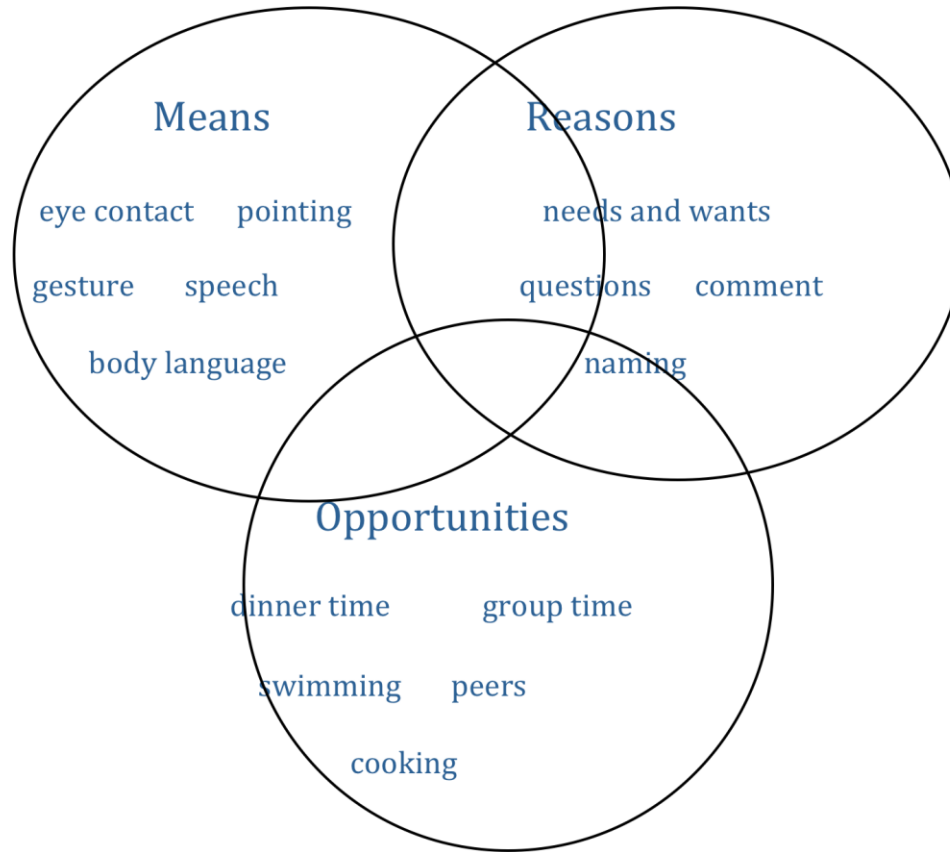
Alison Harris

PAEDIATRIC OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

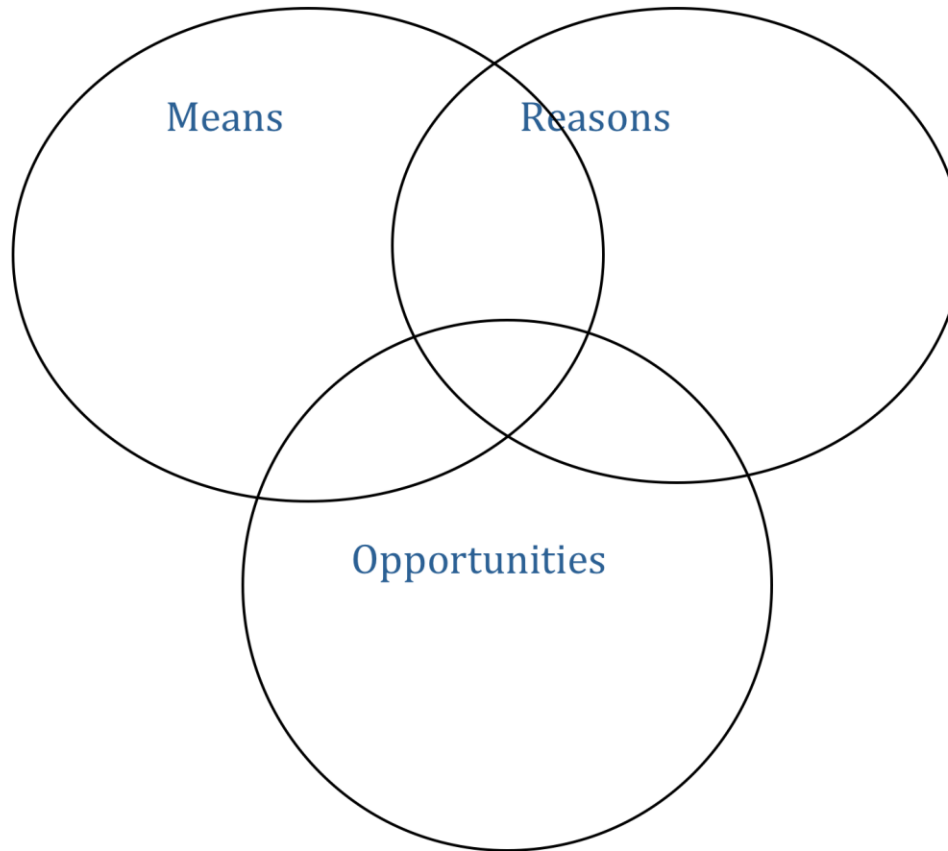
Aims

- To become familiar with the range of communication systems available.
- To develop some setting specific communication systems to begin using.

Means Reasons and Opportunities



Means Reasons and Opportunities



Shaded area =

Clients Name _____

Communication Hierarchy

The means to communicate

Written words

British Sign Language

Signing systems - Makaton, Signalong

Gesture

Makaton Symbols (line drawing)

Picture communication symbols (PCS) – Coloured

Picture communication symbols (PCS) – black and white

Generic photo

Actual photo

Tobies photo

Explaining the Communication Systems

Signs:

Signs are a formalised gesturing system where we use our hands to make a gesture that implies a given meaning.

There are several signing systems, some of which you may have heard of;

- ❖ **Makaton** Vocabulary Project – This is possibly the most well known signing system for students with learning disabilities. The system stems from British Sign Language but has ensured that the signs are more easy to produce, involving less finger spelling and more signs which require less isolation of fingers and two hand movements.
- ❖ **British Sign Language** – Is a language in it's own right. It has a different word order, for example instead of saying 'there is a bird in the tree' BSL signing would order this sentence, 'bird in the tree there is'. BSL has it's own dialects for different regions of the country and it includes a great deal of finger spelling, facial expression and positioning of signs. BSL was originated for the deaf population.
- ❖ **American sign language** – as above but is the American equivalent
- ❖ **Baby signing** – is becoming more popular and many types of baby signing systems are evolving. For example The American Baby Signing was widely published on This Morning some years back. There is more research that is finding that signing with babies from birth can develop children's communication with greater speed. Babies who have been introduced to signing are often able to indicate to their parents what they want before being able to say.
- ❖ **Signalong** – is a further signing system that is used with students with learning disabilities that has extensive vocabularies for early childhood signs through signs for explaining puberty. Often signs are learnt from this system when another system such as Makaton is being used, where a sign is not yet available.

Symbols:

Symbols are a formalised pictorial/visual system where we use a pictorial image or line drawing that implies a given meaning.

There are several symbol systems, some of which you may have heard of;

- ❖ **Makaton** Vocabulary Project – This is possibly the most well known symbol system for students with learning disabilities. The symbols consist of a selection of black and white line drawings. There is evidence to suggest that students with learning disabilities understand these black and white symbols with ease, given that they are highly contrastive with little distraction.



- ❖ **Picture Communication System** – This is a more pictorial symbol system which allows its symbols to be presented as black and white or in colour. Because the symbols are more pictorial it has been established that some students find these easier to understand as they are often less abstract and therefore look more like what they represent.



- ❖ **Signalong** –you may find some sign-along symbols in the Annie Kubler range. They are generally early signs for young babies and toddlers.



Other pictorial/Visual Systems:

Other Pictorial/visual Systems – are those that use photographs or raised objects and even real objects;

- ❖ **Photographs** – These are either a set of generic photographs that can be used to represent activities and every day routines. (There is a CD called

There is a further photographic system called Tobies photos, which looks like this below. They differ to other photos, in that they are usually cut out so that the shape of the object can be seen instead of a bordered photo as seen below this..



Tobies Photo of drink



Standard bordered photo of snack

- ❖ **Objects of reference** – This is where a selected object is shown to the student before each activity/event which has an associated meaning to them. For example a towel to represent a bath, a seat belt to show we are going on the bus. These are often used for students with a visual impairment and for students who show little interest in photos/ pictures and need a more concrete clue.
- ❖ **Raised symbols** – These are a cross between real objects and symbols. They are generally a square card with a raised object on it, for example half a cup. They help the student to see and feel the symbol and therefore gives the student more meaningful understanding. Again these are used for students as above.

Spoken and Literacy Systems:

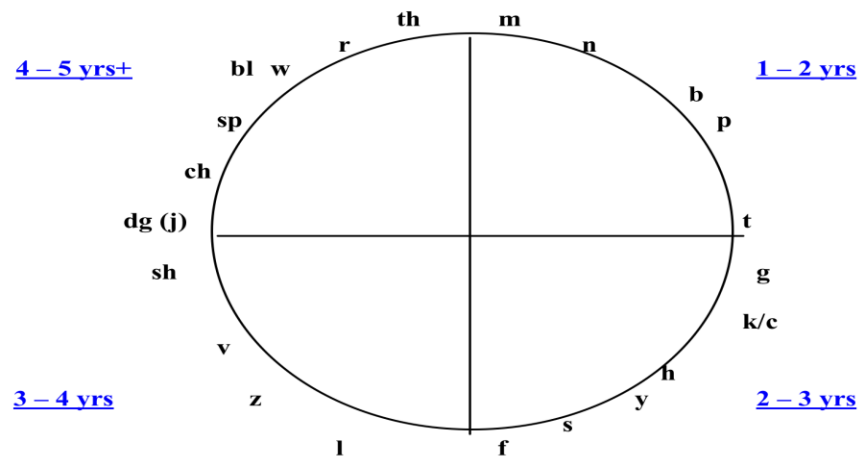
Spoken and Literacy Systems – are those that use actual speech and written words to communicate

❖ **Speech sounds** –

Speech Sound Development “Wheel”

The following diagram shows the development of speech sounds: This explains when in a child’s life each sound will start to emerge.

This is based on ‘normal’ developmental patterns, although there is still huge variation for many children dependant on their circumstances.



❖ **Cued articulation** – This is a signing system specifically for sounds, to help children know where to make the sounds in their mouth, what their tongue, teeth and lips should be doing and whether it is a quiet or a loud sound.

❖ **Phonic systems** – There are a number of phonic systems such as Jolly phonics, Letterland. Which associates a visual picture to each sound to give it meaning. These systems are not usually based on how the sound is made within the mouth, more so associating a language meaning the letter e.g ant for a.

Photo/Symbol Communication Systems

Visual timetables for daily routines: Consider if you need to break down each smaller step of the activity or whether you need to represent the overall routine.

e.g – morning routine

do you need overall steps; get up, bathroom, toilet, bath, dry off, get dressed, clean teeth, brush hair, breakfast

Or

Do you need broken down steps for each; e.g

bath – turn taps on, pour bubble bath, clothes off, turn taps off, in bath, wash body, out of bath, dry with towel, clothes on.

Clean teeth – Cold tap on, toothpaste on brush, clean teeth, wash mouth with water, tooth brush away.

N.B – you will find that visual timetables will take longer to use at first with the student. But remember the aim of the timetable is for the student to begin to carry out these routines independently and use the timetable as a reminder.

We also want students to be able use the photo/symbol through the timetable as a way of indicating that they want something different to happen e.g. teeth first then bath.

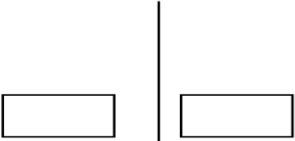
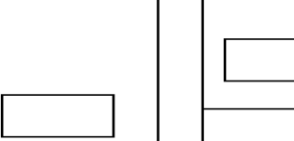
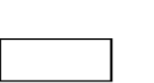
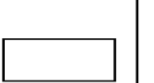
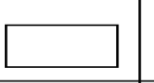

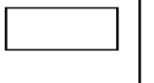

Therefore you should aim to not stop using the timetables, until the student is independent at carrying out their morning routine.

If a visual timetable becomes used as a reminder only you could laminate all the photos on to the timetable in order, so they are no longer removable.

Choice Boards: Used for;

inside activity choices
outside activity choices
offsite activity choices
drinks choices
snack choices

Consider how many choices to present on one page, e.g. some students may only cope with two choices on an A4 page, some four and some six choices.

Ensure if choices are on the board, they **MUST** be available so check first. Therefore the symbols/photo's must be removable. (If these are then likely to go missing, you may consider putting the choice boards within a plastic frame on the wall, which staff can lock.)

You can leave choice boards up on view, but you may find it's easier at first to only bring them out at that time, e.g. snack time, drinks time.

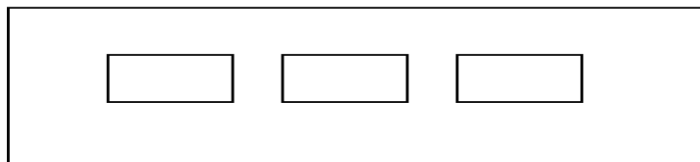
You need to aim for students being able to manage seeing the choices but not being able to have them at that time. (After all if students use speech they would ask at any time so you must be prepared to respond with a negative)

You may use some generic choice boards, e.g. at snack time, which can be used for all students. Remember if you do this, you must use the **EASIEST** communication system e.g. Tobies symbols.

Visual timetable:

These are to clearly indicate to the student what will happen next throughout each part of the morning and then the afternoon.

You need to think about how much the student will be able to understand. E.g first x then y or First X, then Y, then Z.



Now and next cards are a good way to break down activities. The next should always be a motivator e.g first painting then boo game



Consider using different coloured backgrounds to indicate different timetables e.g now and next cards might be yellow, where as visual timetables might be blue. This way the student more easily recognises their timetable.

the strip or even velcro on the back of the strip to put the photo/symbol when finished.

If an activity is no longer going to happen, show the student what it is being replaced by, this will help the student cope more easily with the change.

It's useful to have a blank laminated piece of card that you can always draw or write on, if you are missing the symbol or photo.

GENERAL POINTERS:

The most difficult thing you will find in using these visual communication systems is keeping them resourced. Photo's / symbols will go missing. It's therefore important all staff know how to print off and or generate a symbol or a photo.

It is best to have nominated times to replace missing resources e.g a job night staff do with students before going to bed might be printing off missing symbols.

The easiest reason to stop using visual systems is usually that the student appears to carry out the routine anyway with visual and spoken instructions. What you need to remember at this point is, could the students make themselves understood, in any setting and with any person? If the answer is NO there is still a need to use these visual communication systems. This will be the student's familiar method, in getting their needs met. The visual system will be consistent no matter where they are or who they are with (if they are taken with the student) but the staff and the environments will always change.

Learning of these systems will Not happen over night. It will only be through repetition and consistent routines that the student will become familiar with them and learn how to communicate with them.

It only takes ONE time to NOT USE the visual system and the students might abandon it themselves. Therefore it will be staff's responsibility to model the use of these systems to show the student how they can communicate their needs with them.

If you fail to use the visual systems, then the remaining staff group just as well not bother! If a student learns they can make there's needs known to one member of staff, they are likely to abandon the visual system and go to that member of staff to have their needs met. Therefore as a team you must work consistently together, even if it takes that bit of extra time.

Inclusive Technology

**Inclusive Technology
(PCS)
Gateshead Business Park
Delp
Oldham
OL3 5 BX**

**they sell; Mayer Johnson Boardmaker
Clicker**

www.inclusive.co.uk

Writing with Symbols

**Writing with Symbols
Widgit Software
124 Cambridge Science Park
Milton Road
Cambridge
CB4 0ZS**

www.widgit.com

Other useful websites:

ICAN. National charity for children with speech and language impairments.

**www.ican.org.uk
0870 010 40 66
4 Dyers Building, London, EL1N 2QP**

AFASIC. Association for all speech impaired children

**www.afasic.org.uk
020 7490 9410
2nd Floor, 50 – 52 Great Sutton St, London, L1V 0DT**

Talking point www.talkingpoint.org.uk is a website for parents and professionals developed by ICAN, AFASIC and RCSLT to provide information on the needs of children with speech and language difficulties.

Parent line plus www.parentlineplus.org.uk Help & information for parents "because children come without instructions"

National Autistic Society (NAS)

**www.nas.org.uk
01718 33 2299
393 City Rd, London, EL1V 1NE**

Peach - Parents for the Early Intervention in Autism in Children
The Brackens, London Road, Ascot, Berkshire, SL5 8BE

Tel: 01344 882248 Fax: 01344 882391
www.peach.org.uk

Umbrella

<http://www.umbrella-autism.org.uk/about.htm>