# Communication for Young Children with Visual Impairments and Additional Disabilities

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## Our Communication Journey

* Effect of Visual Impairment on Communication
* Limited concept development
* Limited receptive vocabulary
* Delayed pointing
* Lack of understanding of nonverbal communication (facial expressions, gestures, etc)
* Lack of social communication skills (conversation rules, social norms, etc)

## Effect of Additional Disabilities on Communication

* Motor limitations and hearing loss = fewer sensory channels
* Motor limitations – lack of reach/point/move to desired object
* Cognitive delay = slower processing
* Sensory issues = may just be trying to regulate (not processing language)

## Where to Start?

* Use FVE and IFSP team assessment data to determine
* Visual skills
* Motor ability
* Cognitive level
* Social skills
* Optimal positioning (both child and symbols)
* Sensory integration issues
* What the child likes/dislikes

## Where to start, cont’d

* Start conversations with families
* Discuss routines
* Learn about the family’s priorities
* What is most important to them?
* What do they want represented?
* Decisions should be based on family routines and family choice

## Foundations of Language

* Trusting relationship with caregiver
* Establish the use of touch as a way to communicate
* Predictable Routines
* Embed concepts and vocabulary in context

## Receptive Communication/Input

* The sense (vision, hearing, touch) that receives the message – can be more than one
* The ability to understand the message

## Receptive Communication Goals

* Consistent responses to input
* Concepts/receptive vocabulary
* Time/sequencing
* Building symbolism

## Input options

* Touch cues
* Gestures
* Object cues
* Tangible symbols
* Pictures
* Signs
* Speech

## Touch cues

* Done in the same way and on the same part of the body each time
* Lets the child know that something will happen
* Helps with anticipation, transitions, and structure
* May lessen or prevent tactile defensiveness
* Examples: hi, up, change diaper, sit

## Gestures

* Arms out when baby is picked up
* Pointing
* Extend hand (“give me”)
* Offer object
* Mine
* Come here
* Sit (pat chair)

## Object Cues

* Real objects used in daily routine
* Transition to similar objects
* Anticipators
* Calendar system (what’s next)

## Tangible symbols

* Whole objects or parts of objects mounted on or embedded in cards
* Can be used in the same way as object symbols
* Can be easier to position
* More portable
* Slant bard
* Ring of cards “to go”
* Bridge to 2D symbols

## Pictures

* Pictures are not appropriate for many young children with VI
* Relying on vision alone vs other sensory properties
* Some students may not have requisite visual skills
* Some students may not have requisite cognitive skills
* Vison simulator activity for parents (saran wrap)

## Pictures, cont’d

* Real photo or drawing?
* Consider size, distance, complexity, backlighting, perspective
* Pair objects with pictures to transition
* Digital book story box

## Considerations for CVI

* Visual attention – can the child achieve fixations on the symbols?
* Complexity – solid color background and single color object if possible
* Color highlighting
* Novelty – exact photo of object or tactile card
* Looking does not mean understanding

## Sign/Speech

* Sign or verbal label – can be paired with object
* Describing the environment
* Asking questions
* Modeling
* Need to consider:
* Child’s preferred visual field
* Distance
* Background/clothing
* Consistency (across environment and team members)

## Output (Expressive Communication)

How does the child respond in different situations?

* Body language
* Vocalizations
* Attention/stillness
* Crying

## Communication Goals

* Request object/activity
* Reject object/activity
* Respond/acknowledge
* Share attention (focal point)
* Ask for more detail/information
* Comment on action/object
* Ask a question

## Output Options

* Visual attention
* Body movements
* Gestures
* Vocalizations

## Object cues

* Tangible symbols
* Pictures
* Sign/Speech
* Access Technology

## Progression of Symbolic Communication

## Visual Attention

* Fixation
* Shift of gaze
* Scanning an array

## Body Movements/Gestures

* Body becomes active or gets still
* Reaching for object
* Bringing caregiver’s hand to object
* Pointing to object
* Head nod – this can be life-changing

## Object Symbols

* Choice making
* Requesting
* Focal point of conversation
* Access is key for the child to initiate

## Tangible symbols

* All or part of an object, typically mounted or embedded on a card
* Homemade for EI
* APH STACS cards may be the next step

## Pictures

* Think about presentation
* Communication board or book
* Task lighting/Backlighting
* APH Familiar Objects pictures
* Tablet

## Sign/Speech

* Most abstract form of communication (with print/braille)
* Child may use sign as expressive form and other receptive form
* Child may use a combination of sign/speech
* Consider motor skills

## Access Technology

Some examples

Speech output

Tablet

Eye Gaze system

Balance

Visual supports

Child’s overall abilities (cognitive, motor, etc.)

## Meaningful Communication

* How is the child communicating right now?
* Close observation to assess responses to input
* Does the child have a reason to communicate
* How can we help the child reach the next level of communication?
* Find conversation topics of interest (child’s favorite things)
* Create turn taking opportunities – both motor and communicative
* Use routines (conversations) and games (tickle and teddy bear)

## Our Role

* Explain effect of visual impairment with additional disabilities on communication development
* Provide assessment data on visual functioning and learning channels
* With the IFSP team, find a balance between child’s visual skills and cognitive skills
* Modify communication system to make it accessible (visual or tactile)
* Empower parents to advocate for their child in terms of communication

## Questions?

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ISVI Outreach Calendar

https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=129313