

Supporting Communication for Children with Various Response Modes



“Modes of communication” refers to what a child uses to communicate. Most adults in the world use a combination of spoken speech, gestures, and body language to communicate to one another. That is our means of communication. A child with a significant speech or language delay may have trouble with the spoken speech part of that. In this case, other means of communicating must be considered as appropriate alternatives.

Examples of Modes of Response:

- **Gestures and Body Language**
- **Sign Language**
- **Picture Exchange**
- **Communication Board:** A communication board is a simple alternative/augmentative communication (AAC) device where pictures of things the child may want to communicate are placed on a board and the child is asked to point to the picture of what he wants.
- **Voice-Output Device:** There are many devices out there (and now apps) that will help a child communicate by speaking a message when they push a button. These types of devices can store many different words and messages so they offer a greater variety of options for the child. These devices may take longer for a child to learn but they can grow to meet the child’s linguistic needs as he or she gets older.
- **Core Boards:** Core Boards are often used classwide to introduce the power of language and of Core Vocabulary. They can be used to model language and increase participation.

Note: Programs such as sign language, picture exchange, communication boards, AAC devices, core vocabulary boards are specialized programs which require collaboration and training of staff and family members. Specific information regarding these programs is referenced below:

- Sign Language with Children with Language Delays:
<https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/using-sign-language/>
- Including Sign Language in Early Childhood Classrooms:
<https://teachpreschool.org/2010/09/10/sign-language/>
- Focused Interventions (includes Picture Exchange):
<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/asd2/cresource/q2/p04/>
- Quick and Easy Adaptations and Accommodations for Early Childhood (Teaching Exceptional Children)
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ967485.pdf>
- PrAACtical AAC (includes links to websites, videos, strategies, and AAC Tool Box)
<http://praacticalaac.org/tag/early-childhood/>

Strategies for Supporting Use of Gestures for Increasing Communication

The use of gestures is an important milestone in the development of communication skills. When children experience delays or difficulties with communication and language, they often make use of gestures which have served as their modes of responding to and initiating interactions.

- Point to or hold up objects during routines and interactions
- Use gestures that represent words, for example holding your hands in the shape of a ball when you say "ball."
- When a child uses a gesture or points to an object, respond in one of the following ways:
 - **Look** at it
 - **Label**
 - **Describe**
 - **Ask** about it



Accepting gestures such as pointing is important when children have difficulty communicating. When adults acknowledge and build on the gestures, it reduces frustration and encourages additional communication attempts.

Strategies for Using Visuals to Support Communication Development

Determine and pair the use of the visuals that are described below to assist children in recalling and using vocabulary.

- Object: use of actual objects
- Photo: use of real photographs
- Picture Symbolic: use of colored line drawings
- Line Drawing: use of black and white line drawings
- Text: use of written words and/or numbers

Use visuals during routines to teach and reinforce vocabulary. Remember to describe actions and talk about what is occurring during routines. Ask questions such as "What's next?" to encourage children to point to or verbalize next steps in routines.

Use visuals to support choice making. When first introducing choices, start with 2 or 3 familiar choices and pair the visuals with words so that children are learning the vocabulary associated with the visuals. Choices are an important motivator for communication so it is important that the choices are of interest to the children.

When considering the above list of stages of visual concept development, remember that children are not limited in their abilities to communicate based solely on their understanding of visual representations. All children should be exposed to a variety of communication symbols along with spoken or signed words. It is often helpful to pair a visual symbol with object and verbal input to help children recall the words they hear and "see."