

# Total Communication

## What is a Total Communication Approach?

A **Total Communication approach** supports all forms of communication and does not purely rely on using words to communicate. This approach supports both a child's understanding of and use of language. It is important because it values and acknowledges any communication attempt from each child.

This approach includes any way that a child or young person can communicate with other people.:

- Speech
- Sounds or vocalisations
- Body language and gesture
- Facial expression
- Signing systems (key word signing, Makaton or signalong)
- Symbols and pictures (such as PECS, communication boards and books)
- Photographs
- Objects of reference
- Visual support (such as First and Then boards or Visual Timetables)
- Touch
- Contextual cues
- Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs)

Some children will communicate using different methods for different things. A total communication approach focusses on accepting any way that the child communicates with you.

## How do I use a Total Communication approach?

A Total Communication approach involves adults modelling a variety of different communication methods and systems. There is no expectation for the child to use any or all of these methods independently. In a Total Communication Approach, you need to make sure that you use the spoken word at all times whilst modelling any other communication systems or strategies.

## Why use a Total Communication approach?

Not every child uses talking (spoken language) to communicate with other people. For some children with Language and Communication Needs, their talking will develop alongside their use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

A Total Communication approach:

- Accepts, respects and acknowledges any form of communication a child or young person is able to use
- Supports and benefits the development of spoken language
- Supports children's understanding while they are still learning what words mean



- Enables the child and young person to express their needs, wants and views which can help to reduce frustration and anxiety

## Who uses a Total Communication approach?

### Anyone can use a Total Communication approach!

It is often used with children and adults who have Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). These needs may be linked to another diagnosis such as Autism, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Speech Sound Disorders or Learning Disabilities or they may exist on their own.

You don't need any specialist training to use a Total Communication Approach, you just need to think about how you can support the words you are using in your spoken language with other things available to you in your environment such as objects, pictures, signs, symbols and gestures.

See our advice sheets on '*Using visuals*' to support communication for more information. You might also like to view advice sheets on '*Objects of reference*', '*Making choices*' and using '*Choosing boards*' to support communication development.

