

Communication

Communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, feelings and thoughts from one individual to another. Communication is commonly mistaken for 'speech.' Speech refers to the physical production of the individual sounds in words. Various oral structures such as the tongue, lips and vocal cords work together to produce these sounds when we speak. It is important to consider communication in all its' multifaceted forms as it is more than just spoken language! Acknowledging that this is just one way to communicate ensures a holistic approach to intervention.

Broadening the Definition of Communication

When individuals communicate, they encode (express) and decode (interpret/understand) messages. Individuals communicate through various modalities. This includes but is not limited to:

- Speech
- Gesture
- Sign language
- Written text
- Eye contact
- Facial expressions
- Body language

A child's ability to encode a message may be higher or lower than their ability to decode a message. For example, a child may have the skills to express basic needs and wants using their spoken language. They may require a higher level of support to interpret instructions or information delivered to them verbally. Effective communication involves the integration of both verbal and non-verbal modalities.

Why use a Total Communication Approach?

A total communication approach maximises communication opportunities by using various modes of communication e.g. modelling verbal language, implementing communication devices and using some key word signs and visuals where appropriate. This creates an inclusive communication environment that considers the diverse ways individuals express themselves and interpret information.

How to Implement a Total Communication Approach

- Observe the child and consider 'how' they are communicating with you. What are the child's communication preferences and learning style?
- Acknowledge non-verbal modes of communication and respond to all communication attempts.
- Interpret the child's facial expressions, vocalisations and body language. Treat these as intentional forms of communication. For example, if the child looks towards you or reaches for a toy, they may be requesting "more."
- Use pictures/visuals to facilitate and reinforce a child's understanding of spoken language if required.