1: Introduction and How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit, created by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network [1], is designed to help you access communication evaluations and tools for effective communication for people with communication-related developmental disabilities. These may include autism, apraxia, cerebral palsy, and other developmental disabilities that affect communication.

Everybody Communicates!

People sometimes assume that people with communication-related disabilities don't want to communicate or can't communicate. This assumption can prevent people from getting the supports they need. But everybody communicates - whether using language, behavior, gestures, facial expressions, sounds, or other means.

People with communication-related disabilities are also often harmed by low expectations. While teaching simple requests, numbers, and greetings may be appropriate for very young children, older children and adults with communication-related disabilities need to have access to a much wider range of human expression - including the ability to ask questions and make statements about the past and future.

Why is Communication Important?

Effective communication is necessary for success in almost every aspect of life.

- **Health:** Without effective communication, people may be unable to explain their symptoms or understand how to follow doctors' instructions.
- **Self-determination:** Effective communication can help individuals express preferences and make decisions, from preferred meals to housing and major healthcare decisions.
- **Person-centered planning:** Effective communication can help ensure that individuals have input when planning their services and supports. This not only helps promote autonomy and self-determination but can also help identify which supports are needed and which are likely to work.

What Do Good Communication Supports Look Like?

In order to gain that access, people with communication-related disabilities need the right supports.

First, supporters must **presume competence**. If a person isn't able to do much more than say individual words or make basic requests, supporters shouldn't assume that that's because they have nothing else to say. Instead, assume that this means that they haven't yet figured out the right supports that work for them.

Second, supporters need to **be persistent**. It can take time for people to learn how to use a communication system. And if a communication support system isn't working even after a reasonable learning period, try another!

Supporters need to **get the right training**. Imagine trying to learn a language from teachers who don't know that language very well themselves. Communication is a two-way street - without a fluent communication partner, it will not be possible for individuals to become fluent themselves.

Supporters need to pay attention to both **expressive and receptive** communication. It is just as important to learn how to understand others as it is to learn how to express oneself. Focusing on only one of these two domains will not necessarily improve a person's skills in the other domain.

A ?Total Approach? to Communication

Communication touches on all aspects of a person's life. It's therefore important to take a "total approach" to communication. This means:

- Ensuring that individuals have access to their preferred mode of communication **at all times**, not just in certain programs or situations
- Recognizing and responding to **all** forms of communication a person uses
- Ensuring that individuals **always** have access to communication partners and supporters who understand the way they communicate;
- Ensuring that individuals have access to **open-ended** forms of communication to the greatest extent possible and are not limited to pre-selected words or phrases

Where Can I Get Communication Supports?

Effective communication evaluations, tools, and supports may be available through:

- Health insurance (including Medi-Cal)
- School programs
- Vocational Rehabilitation programs
- Regional Centers
- The Americans with Disabilities Act

This guide will help you navigate these systems to access communication supports.

Language
English

- Site Map
- UCSF Main Site

Source URL: https://odpc.ucsf.edu/communications-paper/1-introduction-and-how-to-use-this-toolkit

Links
[1] http://autisticadvocacy.org/