






EMPOWERING THE STUDENT TO BE AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Students with complex communication needs use a variety of ways to communicate, including gestures, sign language, picture boards, speech generating devices, and apps on iPads or tablets. There are often challenges with developing a student's communication skills. Here are some ideas for solutions:

Challenge	Solution
<p>Student is passive; seeming disinterest in communicating with others</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and respond to all of the student's communication attempts. • List all the ways that the student communicates and how to respond in their Personal Dictionary. • Don't anticipate the student's every need and want, so that there is a need to communicate. • Teach the student a way to get attention such as vocalizing, gesturing, using a switch activated call buzzer or light; or lifting up their arm that has a communication bracelet on it. • Use creative "forgetting." For example, set the student up with a motivating activity, such as listening to music. "Forget" to turn the music on, wait for up to 10 seconds silently, responding immediately to the student's request for attention. • If the student doesn't initiate a request for attention, use verbal or physical prompts, and fade them out over time.
<p>Student responds to others' communication, but doesn't initiate communication.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the student in motivating activities that encourage initiation. • Use activities that have a number of parts, so that the student needs to request them: e.g., puzzles, ingredients in a recipe, building sets, markers). • Wait silently for up to 10 seconds, and look for any subtle way that the student is initiating a request, such as glancing in the direction of the desired object. • Model how to initiate communication using an augmentative/alternative system, but remember that any system should complement not complicate

<p>Student's reasons for communicating are restricted, often just communicating for needs and wants.</p> 	<p>existing means of communication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model how to make comments, share information, give opinions, share emotions using the student's augmentative or alternative communication system. • Comment briefly and avoid asking a lot of closed-ended or wh-questions. • Wait, signal, and expect a response. • Notice what the student is trying to communicate, and add the needed vocabulary, if necessary.
<p>Student takes few conversational turns</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for turn taking, such as book reading, computer games, apps, talking about recent or upcoming events. • Model different types of messages, and teach ways to initiate, maintain, and terminate conversations.
<p>Student communicates with adults but has limited opportunities to communicate with peers.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the student with peers who have mutual interests (e.g., music, watching hockey, swimming, cooking) • Provide materials and activities that can be used interactively.
<p>Student has significant sensory impairments that inhibit knowing that a potential communication topic exists, or that a communication partner is present.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the student know you are present by speaking and touching their upper arm. • Be in a physical position so that the student can see you. • Talk about what is happening in the environment. Bring things over for the student to see and touch as you talk. • Use materials with contrast, against an uncluttered background, and with the student's back to the light source. • Remember that the student's vision can fluctuate. Reminds others about this.



- Communicate when you're leaving.