Using a Total Communication Approach

Total communication means using words, objects, photographs, pictures, signs and symbols when we are communicating.

Using a total communication approach helps children to understand us when we are talking.

It also helps children to develop their preferred means or way of communicating with us.

Why do we use a total communication approach?

We know a total communication approach helps:

- Develop a child’s communication skills
- Children to understand our words when we are talking
- Provide children with a model for communication – they may copy our signs, pointing to pictures or use an object when they want to communicate with us
- Everyone to participate when we are interacting with each other
- Children to develop a preferred means of communication, i.e. their preferred mode or way of communicating with us

How does total communication help to develop a child’s communication skills?

To develop functional communication, children need a means of communication, a reason to communicate and the opportunity to interact and communicate with others.

Using a total communication approach helps children to develop a means of communication.

Means – how we communicate

This is how we communicate and the way we communicate, e.g. through spoken word, signs, symbols and gesture. This also includes the volume we talk and the rate at which we talk and sign. Without the means to communicate, children and young people cannot express themselves.
**Reasons – why we communicate**
This is why we communicate, for example to make choices and decisions, to reject, to ask for help, to ask questions, to comment and to share information. Without a reason, there is no purpose or need to communicate.

**Opportunities – where, when and with whom we communicate**
This is about the opportunities we have to communicate – where, when, with whom. This may be in the community, at home, at school, with friends, with parents, with other adults. Without opportunities, there is no communication.

**How can we use a total communication approach at home?**

Help children to **understand** what is happening next.

For example, before going outside or for a walk, show an object linked to that activity or use a photograph or symbol or use the sign alongside the spoken word.

*Look ... truck*

During play, **comment** on what the child is doing.
Use words, signs and point to the objects as they play.

Take **photographs** of activities during the day.

For example while outside playing in the garden or when out for a walk, take photos so you can look back and comment on those experiences.

Have **objects, photos or symbols** in certain areas around the house so that your child can make a request.

For example, have a picture of a fruit next to the fruit bowl, a picture of yoghurt next to the fridge or a picture of Lego by the play area.

Give your child a **choice** or help them to make a request.

For example offer two objects to choose from, or two photographs so they can point to their choice, for example they could choose ‘grapes or banana’.

**Observe** your child’s responses to identify a like/dislike or when they are asking for help.

For example e.g. if they pull a face they may not like something. They may smile to indicate more. They may reach/ pass an object to an adult to indicate they need help.