

Communication

Helping children to communicate their needs is probably the most important contribution that can be made to their long-term independence and social competence.

Some general principles in encouraging communication:

- Provide opportunities for children to communicate at their level. Do not anticipate every need - either provide choices or when appropriate, wait for children to initiate communication.
- Provide opportunities for choice making. Making choices is an important foundation for communication and helps children to develop a sense of control over their surroundings. Objects / pictures / photos / symbols can be used to encourage choice making in all situations e.g. selecting a snack at morning tea, choosing activities during free play, picking a favourite song at group time, etc.
- Gain children's attention before talking to them.
- Many children with cerebral palsy communicate as easily as other children their age. Others experience difficulties ranging from mild to severe, such as:
 - Unclear speech because of difficulties with the movements required for speech.
 - Difficulties with understanding and/or expressing ideas.
 - Inability to talk but may use alternative forms of communication such as signing or picture boards.

Ideas to consider:

- Some children may be slow to respond - so allow adequate time for responses. Encourage and accept every attempt made by the child to communicate whether by speaking, looking or gesturing.
- Instructions may need to be simplified and given one step at a time.
- Setting up and using appropriate communication aids for all activities allows the child to communicate and enhances participation. This may involve using signs and gestures to accompany verbal instructions, using picture cards to display the pre-school routine, etc.
- Communication devices are sometimes needed for children to express their needs. An example of such a device is the Big Mack switch that prerecords a message that can be played by pressing the switch. It could be used by children to get attention or make requests, to participate in group songs or tell news.

Whichever methods of communication are used it is important for all people involved with the child to use a consistent approach.