

FOCUS FLYER

COMMUNICATION: *What is it? Why do we communicate? How do we communicate? What do we need to communicate?*

The first of a three part series by Cassandra Holly

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Communication, what is it?

When you think of the word communication, what comes to mind? You may think of two friends talking to each other on the phone. Another person may think of his or her child using sign language or an assistive device to communicate. Still another may think of communication such as a baby crying to let you know he/she is wet or hungry. Well these are all ways to communicate, but when we think of communication, we need think of what is all involved in the process.

First, communication is the exchange of a message between *two* or more people. Two or more people must be involved in order for it to be true communication. Everyone communicates in some way, whether it is through speech, gestures, body language or what have you. All people are communicative.

Communication can be thought of as *expressive* or *receptive*. Expressive communication is expressing yourself to someone or getting your message across to someone. An example would be expressing your wants and needs to another person. Receptive communication, on the other hand, is understanding or comprehending what is being said. An example of receptive communication would be if you were to ask your child to do something would he/she be able to understand and follow through.

Ways we communicate:

As previously stated, people send and receive messages in different ways, which in turn causes communication to come in a variety of forms. One of the most familiar forms of communication is speech. Speech may include verbalizations or vocalizations. An example of these two forms could be thought of in this way, Say you know a child or individual that when they need or want something they may cry or make a sound as a form of getting your attention and communicating with you. As parents and teachers of early intervention students or with your own children, you may have seen this as a response or an attention getter. Other forms of communication may include:

- Verbalizations
- Gestures (pushing away or pointing)
- Vocalizations
- Hitting or Biting
- Signs
- Assistive Technology
- Gazing or staring
- Smiling & Laughing
- Three point gaze
- Changes in muscle tone
- Hugging
- Whining & Crying
- Objects
- Head movement
- Reaching & touching
- Pictures

Flyer & Article Resources:

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

www.tsbvi.edu

DB-Link :

<http://www.dblink.org>

Helen Keller National

www.hknc.org

Quotes from:

A Guide to Planning and Support for Individuals Who Are Deafblind Edited by John M. McInnes

Communication continued

For children who are deaf-blind any number of these forms of communication or a combination of any of these forms may be used. How many times have we seen a student or our children use some if not most of the types of communication listed? For instance; we have some students that may gesture to get what he/she wants or we may have some that tense up their muscles and use body language as a form of communication. For example; if you have a child who is non-verbal but every time you mention going to a certain place or doing something in particular and he/she tenses up, that might be interpreted as a like or dislike response. Whichever it may be the child is still communicating.

Why do we communicate?

Now we know what communication is but the thought comes to mind, "Why do we communicate?" We have already mentioned some of the reasons in the previous discussion on the forms of communication. So let's look at some more of the reasons we communicate.

REASONS TO COMMUNICATE:

- Requesting
- Gaining Attention
- Making Choices
- Social Interactions
- Confirming
- Replying
- Commenting
- Protesting/Rejecting
- Directing Attention
- Greeting
- Offering
- Asking
- Labeling

At some point in our daily lives, we have all used one or all of the reasons to communicate. However, one of the most used reasons to communicate is requesting. Just think of how many times a day we make a request for something. The request could be for our students or children to do something for us or requesting could be used for buying a cup of coffee at the local coffee shop. The children we work with make hundreds of requests a day, the reason they request could be to get something they need, get more of something and to interact with others.

Gaining attention is a big part of communication. Children who do not use speech as their primary source of communication will use other forms to gain attention. How many of us have had the experience of working with a student or child

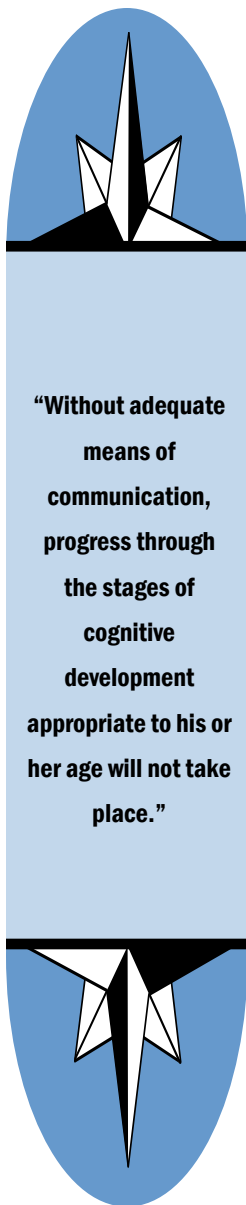
banging their fist or an object on the table in front of them, in order to get our attention?

I remember in one deaf-blind simulation activity that I was involved in which I was blindfolded and using earplugs. I was sitting at the table and was given what I thought was whipped cream in my hands. I put it up to my nose to smell it and then got some in my mouth and eyes. It quickly began to sting and burn. I found out it was shaving cream instead. I sat there with my hand up waiting for one of the teachers to acknowledge me. After waiting for what I thought was an eternity with no response, I began banging on the table for attention. After the third attempt of banging the teacher came, patted me on the hand, and said, "Don't do that." Finally, I got so frustrated that I stood up and was determined to find the bathroom sink on my own. This may be a familiar story to many of us. Does this scenario remind you of some of the children you know? This goes to show that communication can be misinterpreted as a behavior problem.

Another part of communication is protesting and rejecting. Oh, this is a big part of our students and children's daily communication with us. How many times have we during a meal tried to help our children eat and they turn their head, throw the food on the ground, or push it away? These are all forms of communication. The reason they are pushing the food away is maybe they don't like it or just don't want to eat. Rejecting something is a way to communicate that you don't want it or you want something else.

Greetings are a part of communication that children learn at an early age. I can think of children I work with that may not be able to say a lot but they have the bye or hi down. Greetings are used to initiate conversation/communication exchanges and to end a conversation. Greetings are also a part of the social interaction that so many of the children we work with crave on a daily basis.

Making choices is another part of the communication exchange. The communication may include statements like, "I want more drink" or "I would like to go outside". Making choices helps our children or students gain more skills that increase their independence and their communication attempts and social interaction.



"Without adequate means of communication, progress through the stages of cognitive development appropriate to his or her age will not take place."

Communication continued

Social Interaction is so important when it comes to fostering communication development in our children and students. This is one area that children who are deaf-blind may have limited opportunities to interact with people other than family and services providers. This is such a vital area of development because it helps motivate the child to initiation conversation and increase the communication development.

To sum it up this issue, we looked at communication with the idea of what it is, why we communicate and ways to communicate. In the next issue of the Focus Flyer, we will look at *Barriers to communication* and *Ways to increase communication*. I feel this will be information that can be used to help develop a functional communication system for our children and students. Hopefully, you will find the information to be useful. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me, Cassondra Holly at cassondra.holly@usm.edu or Toni Hollingsworth at toni.hollingsworth@usm.edu.



COMMUNICATION RESOURCES

Intervener Training Program Underway!

Mississippi is piloting a new way of providing high quality services to students with deafblindness. Six paraprofessionals from around the state have started the first of 3 on-line courses (Introduction to Deafblindness, Communication and Interaction, and Additional Issues in Deafblindness Including Multiple Disabilities) now offered at Salt Lake Community College. Tuition cost is offered to this pilot group through the MS DeafBlind Project. The courses have been developed by Linda Alsop at the SKI-HI Institute at Utah State University. The 3 year project (course development and implementation) is funded by a U.S. Department of Education: Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (PIPSE) grant. Congratulations to this pilot group who have made this commitment to improve their ability to work effectively with individuals who are deafblind!



“As a general rule, unless you wish to convey that communication is unimportant, include the deafblind individual in every conversation taking place in his or her presence.”

Books:

Hand In Hand: Essentials of Communication and Orientation and Mobility for Your Students Who Are Deaf-Blind: Volume I - Huebner, Kathleen Mary (Ed.); Prickett, Jeanne Glidden (Ed.); Welch, Therese Rafalowski (Ed.); Joffee, Elga (Ed.) — AFB Press: 1995, xlv, 687. This particular book is intended primarily for self-study. It is divided into three segments: Key Concepts, Communication, and Orientation and Mobility. Each of these segments is, in turn, divided into 20 self-contained modules which present essential information about deaf-blindness, how deaf-blindness affects learning, and how students who are deaf-blind can develop critical communication and O&M skills. Available from: AFB Press, Customer Service, P.O. Box 1020, Sewickley, PA 15143. Phone: 800-232-3044. Fax: 412-741-0609. Cost: \$64.95 for the 2 volume set. The complete series of Hand in Hand books and video are \$169.95. Publisher's web site: <http://www.afb.org/catalog99>.

Communication: A Guide to Teaching Students with Visual and Multiple Impairments - Hagood, Linda. — *Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) 1997, xiv, 382*. A resource guide for teachers and model for teaching communication skills to students with visual and multiple impairments is set forth. Assessment of communication skills, the planning of instruction, selection of communication methods and contexts, sample activity routines, and strategies for solving problems are discussed. Order from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 1100 W. 45th St., Austin, TX 78756, (512) 206-9240. Publisher's web site: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/publications>.

from DB-LINK: www.dblink.org or call: 1-800-438-9376 to order:

Parents' Perspective On...Behavior, Communication And Instructional Strategies - NTAC/NFADB Parent Workshop. National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind/National Family Association for Deaf-Blind: 1998, 4 pages. Created by 80 parents, this is a list of the most important practices to parents in the areas of behavioral issues, communication and instructional strategies in the education of their child who is deafblind. Available from DB-LINK.

Communication Interactions - This fact sheet was adapted from one originally written by Kathleen Stremel and published and distributed within the state of Mississippi by the Mississippi Statewide Project for Individuals who are Deaf and Blind. DB-LINK: The National Information Clearinghouse On Children Who Are Deaf-Blind, August 2000 Revised.



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We're on the web!
www.usm.edu/msdb

UPCOMING TRAINING EVENTS

- **DELTA Parent Group Meeting: Monday, November 13, 2006;** Coahoma County, Location: TBA; Additional Meetings will be held regionally; If interested in hosting or attending your regional meeting, please contact: Cindy @ 601-853-8347

Spring 2007 Workshops

- **Parents & Teachers: Effective IEPs for Children with DeafBlindness:** *presented by Toni Hollingsworth,* Regional Locations: TBA
- **Individualized Functional Communication:** *presented by Cassandra Holly and Lisa Burck;* Regional Locations: TBA

National Training Team Events

October 23 - 27, 2006 (Mon - Fri):

Person-Centered Approach to Habilitation: Transformation

October 30 - November 3, 2006 (Mon - Fri)

Technology Seminar: The Magic of Technology

Contact: National Training Team @ call 1-516-944-8900 ext 233 or
<http://www.hknc.org/fieldServicesNTTSchedule.htm>

PROJECT SPARKLE Family Lead for Portfolio Development

CONTACT CINDY WILLIAMSON @ 601-853-8347



NEW TO THE PROJECT

Hi. I'm Toni Hollingsworth, the newest member of the Mississippi Deaf-Blind Project. After being raised on the coast, I started out at USM in Education for the Deaf and took additional classes in blindness thinking that I could prepare myself for working with students with deafblindness. My first years teaching gave me great experiences but left me with the desire to learn more. Therefore, off to Maryland I went to pursue another degree, this time in deafblindness. Once that work was completed, I worked for numerous years with adults who experienced blindness and deafblindness. These years taught me about adult services, transition services and the challenges these individuals face daily in their quest for a quality life. Finally, I returned to the educational setting at The Maryland School for the Blind where I coordinated services and training for students, staff and families. Well, coming full circle to return to USM to work in the area of deafblindness is an incredible dream come true and I look forward to doing a little bit of everything and meeting all of you. This year our Project's focus will be Communication as well as writing effective Individualized Educational Plans and establishing regionally based Parent Groups. While we'll be offering training in every section of the state, we'll be listening to what you tell us about your needs. I look forward to getting to know our beautiful state while traveling around to meet all of you. Of course, if any of you have any requests or questions, please call the office, 601-266-5048, or my cell: 228-249-9660, or write me at toni.hollingsworth@usm.edu.