

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.



What are communication tools?

When a person has a communication difficulty, which may be because of a condition such as autism, cerebral palsy, a learning disability, or due to a brain injury or degenerative illness, they may need tools or alternative ways to communicate. This fact sheet will cover some of the communication tools available, as well as signposting you to places that can help you and give further information on your options so that you can choose the best options for your child or young person.

Who benefits from using communication tools?

We all know how important communication is. It allows us to interact with other people and to express our needs as well as our likes and dislikes. If a person has speech and language difficulties, finding other ways to help them communicate using whatever tool(s) are best for them allows them to express their views. It ensures they have a say in everything from day-to-day choices to important decisions, wherever possible, which will have a positive impact on their self-esteem and mental health.

Types of communication tools

Finding the communication tools that are most suitable to your child will depend on their individual needs and abilities. Tools include: gestures and sign language, pictures, communication boards, tablets and speech-generating devices. Sometimes these tools are referred to as 'augmentative and alternative communication', or AAC for short.

Your child's Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) will be able to advise you on which ones would be most helpful for your child. Communication tools can be divided into two categories:

Unaided tools

These are low-tech and do not use extra equipment. Instead, they rely on things such as a person's facial expressions, ability to gesture and make vocalisations and or by teaching them to use sign language such as Makaton or British Sign Language (BSL). The advantage of these is that people do not need to carry extra equipment with them so there's no risk of it breaking down or being lost. On the down side, signing is only helpful when communicating with others who know the system. In effect, the child is dependent on a communication partner who knows them and their communication system. Also, if a child has a disability that affects their movements, they may find certain hand gestures needed for signing difficult.

Aided tools

Aided tools covers anything from low-tech methods such as picture symbols, talking mats, communication books and picture exchange cards (PECS), which are often used by children with autism. High-tech methods cover anything from devices that can be used to record a single message, to others that record a selection of messages, through to Voice Communication Aids (VOCAs). Simple VOCAs are machines that have paper overlays with symbols on them relating to a particular situation, so for example, a child may have a card for 'school' with various visual symbols on it).

Other VOCAs use screens with digital symbols so the child can flick through them. High-tech communication tools can be operated by touch, switches, a pointer or a joystick. The most sophisticated and expensive systems are operated by tracking eye movements.

A number of communication apps are also available for use on iPads and iPhones, at a cost. These include 'iAssist Communicator' and Proloquo2Go.



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Ask about

- **IAS** – Amaze provides Information, Advice and Support (IAS) on health, education, benefits and social care issues for families with children and young people with SEN and disabilities in Brighton and Hove. We have a helpline, publications and a website. We also run workshops and courses and can offer one to one support with EHC planning and making DLA and PIP claims. Call Amaze on: **01273 772289** or visit: **www.amazebrighton.org.uk**.
- **Speech and language therapy service** – works with 0 to 16 year olds with speech and language difficulties in various locations including children's centres, health clinics, special education and mainstream schools, hospitals, and pre-school settings. Therapeutic services are provided via the Integrated Child Development and Disability Centre at Seaside View. Ask a health or education professional to refer you to the service or contact them directly for more information on: **01273 242079**.
- **Specialist Learning Support Services** – Brighton and Hove's learning support services help children and young people with speech, language and communication needs who attend mainstream primary and secondary schools. They help to identify speech, language and communication needs and provide activities and groups to support pupils with these needs. Speak to the SENCO at your child's school.
- **The Compass Card** – this is a free leisure discount card (administered by Amaze) for 0 to 25 year olds with significant additional needs who live or go to school in Brighton and Hove or West Sussex, or who are looked after by social services in these areas. Call Amaze on: **01273 772289 (Brighton and Hove)** or **0300 123 9186 (West Sussex)**.
- **Making a claim for DLA** – you don't need a specific diagnosis to claim Disability Living Allowance for your child – you just need to prove that your child's care or mobility needs are significantly greater than the needs of their peers. For further information visit: **www.gov.uk/dla-disability-livingallowance-benefit/overview** or call the Amaze helpline on: **01273 772289** – we can offer information and advice on making a claim.
- **PECS** – Picture Exchange Communication System. Workshops and courses for parents and carers. Visit: **http://www.pecs-unitedkingdom.com/** or call: **01273 609555**.

Further reading and useful links

- **Ace Centre** – organisation providing information, training and support for both Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and Assistive Technology (AT). See: **www.acecentre.org.uk** for more information or call: **01865 759 800**.
- **Communication Matters** – a UK organisation offering information and support for people with complex communication needs, as well as information on how to fund AAC. See: **www.communicationmatters.org.uk** or call: **0845 456 8211** for details.
- **Do2Learn** – free printable resources, such as picture cards: **www.do2learn.com**.
- **Local Offer**: The local authority's online listing of all the services and support that are available to families with children with SEND in the area. Visit: **www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/localoffer**.
- **Makaton Charity** – information about Makaton signing. See: **www.makaton.org** or call their enquiries line on: **01276 606760**.
- **Talking Point** – I CAN website full of information and advice on children's communication. Visit: **www.talkingpoint.org.uk**. Call: **020 7843 2544** for advice or email: **help@ican.org.uk**.

