Factsheet

What is Total Communication?

LDN LONDON
Learning Disability Network London

Including Everyone

A **Total Communication** approach uses all available methods, including speech, sign language, and objects, to ensure effective and inclusive communication.

Total Communication ensures that the people we support have every opportunity to understand and to be understood. By integrating speaking, signing, and physical resources, we ensure that no one is excluded.

Total Communication is central to our values, promoting dignity and respect at every opportunity. This approach empowers the people we support to express themselves, make choices, and be recognised and valued as an individual.

Key Principles

1 **Total Communication** promotes the use of all types of communication, including gestures, sign language, speech, pictures, objects, and writing. It aims to create an inclusive, supportive communication environment, utilising every available means to facilitate understanding and expression.

2 This approach focuses on finding and using the right combination of communication methods for everyone. It helps form connections, it ensures successful interactions, and supports the exchange of information. By using a combination of methods, we reinforce and strengthen meaning for each person.

3 **Total Communication** also involves creating a positive environment that enhances communication and interaction. For example, this might include:
- Adjusting the lighting in the room.
- Reducing background noise.
- Changing positions for better visibility or audibility.
- Minimising clutter and removing distractions.
- Using objects of reference to prompt memory and provide consistency.

Benefits of Total Communication

- **Enhanced Understanding:** People can understand information more effectively when multiple communication methods are used.
- **Improved Expression:** People can express their needs, desires, and feelings more clearly and confidently.
- **Increased Inclusion:** No one is excluded.
- **Strengthened Relationships:** Effective communication fosters stronger connections between people.
- **Empowerment:** People can make choices and have their voices heard, promoting autonomy and self-advocacy.
- **Dignity and Respect:** Providing multiple communication options upholds the dignity and respect of the people we support.

Examples of Communication

Non-word-based Communication:
Body movements, breathing patterns, and eye pointing. Textures, smells, temperature, intensive interaction, and routine.

Word-based Communication:
Speech, lip reading, deafblind manual alphabet, large print, Braille, block alphabet, and sign systems such as British Sign Language (BSL) and Makaton.

Symbol Systems:
Using objects of reference (real objects and object symbols), Bliss, Widgit, Mayer-Johnson, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), line drawings, pictures, and photographs.

Staff Role in Total Communication:

- **Using a Range of Communication Methods:** Employing gestures, sign language, speech, pictures, objects, and writing as needed.
- **Creating an Inclusive Environment:** Fostering a supportive atmosphere for all communication styles.
- **Customising Communication Approaches:** Identifying and using the right combination of methods for each person.
- **Facilitating Connections and Interactions:** Helping to form meaningful connections and ensure successful interactions.

- **Supporting Information Exchange:** Aiding in the clear and effective exchange of information.
- **Reinforcing Meaning:** Using multiple communication methods to reinforce and clarify meaning.
- **Using Intensive Interaction:** Building rapport and connections with individuals through shared and engaging activities
- **Using Objects of Reference** - items used to represent activities, people, places, or ideas. Examples include a toothbrush for brushing teeth, a miniature car for traveling, or a frame photograph for identifying a person.