Communication Books

Communication books are a way of representing speech / sentences and usually contain a large variety of symbols and words organised into different categories. The individual is required to point to the symbols to make up the sentence: they may or may not be able to speak the message as they do this.

The number of symbols used to make up a sentence will be dependent on the individual's ability. Please discuss this with a speech pathologist if you are unsure.

DESIGNING YOUR BOOK

There is no "right" way of making a book. As long it is easy and efficient for the individual and their communication partner to use, you are on the right track. However, some points to consider include:

- The book needs to be easy for both the individual and their communication partner. Therefore think about the size of the symbols (so the individual can accurately point to them), size of the book (so that it is portable), and presentation format (book, binder, folder -so the individual is able to turn the pages).
- Make a list of vocabulary the individual needs. There is 'core' vocabulary (everyday words) and 'fringe' vocabulary (not so common words, more activity based, e.g. dinosaurs.)
- Include a variety of vocabulary to maximise the sentences that the individual can create.
- Different parts of the sentence could be colour coded to help the client structure the sentences, for example, green for verbs, orange for nouns, blue for adjectives, pink for social phrases. (This uses the Fitzgerald Key, see Colour Coding handout for further explanation).
- To help new people know how the book is used, it may be useful to include a "How to use a communication book" page, which specifically relates to how the individual will use it and how to model language.

HOW TO USE A COMMUNICATION BOOK

- Model the use of the communication book when interacting with the individual. This means that as you (or the individual's communication partner) talk to the individual, you point to the corresponding symbols in their communication book. This allows you to model correct sentence structure and new vocabulary.

- Provide many opportunities for the individual to use their communication book in a variety of situations including games, structured activities, news time etc. Initially, it may help to identify specific activities in which to use the communication book.
- The individual should point to each symbol to make up the sentence: if they are able, they can also attempt to speak the words as they do this. If a individual finds speech difficult, do not force them to speak, but accept pointing as their mode of communication.
- Respond to any communication your individual makes, e.g. If the individual points to 'TV', use their book to model and say 'want TV' or 'TV on' before turning the TV on. Provide lots of praise and positive reinforcement when the individual communicates with you. While they are learning to use the book, it is important that you provide specific feedback and respond quickly to their communication
- The communication book should be kept with the individual whenever possible. If it needs to be put away, ensure it is in an easily accessible place and that the individual has a means of indicating that they need / want their book.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Remember that the communication book is for chatting and commenting. Avoid using the book to 'test', e.g. "Can you find the symbol for book?"
- If asking questions, try to ask open ended questions ("What can you see?") rather than closed or yes/no questions ("Is that a dog?")
- Use the book to expand the individual's communication and to model longer and more complex sentences and ideas. Do not worry if you are not using the exact grammar.
- As the individual's skills develop, encourage the individual to continue to grow and develop their language. Encourage and model:
  - Sentence building – making longer and more complex sentences, e.g. If the individual says, "want icecream", you could model "I want chocolate icecream".
  - Use of different communication functions:
    - requesting ('I want')
    - commenting ('It was fun")
    - informing ("I saw a movie")
    - questioning, ("Who is it?")
    - labelling ("Red shirt")
    - responding
- Encourage the individual to use their book for social chat as well. Model the use of continuers and fillers, e.g. "Uh, huh", "Cool!", Yeah!", "Tell me more".
- Continue to add to your communication book, as the individual's vocabulary and understanding grows and develops. A communication book is always a work in progress!

If you have any questions about putting together a communication book, please call the speech pathologist from the CATS team on 02 9890 0181.

The following book/resource disc may also be useful when thinking about using a communication book with your individual.

Latham, C. *Developing and Using a Communication Book* (2005) Ace Centre Advisory Trust, Oxford.

Porter, G. *Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display Communication Books* (2007)