

Communication using Symbols – A Carer's Training Pack

Train

Global Symbols CIC https://globalsymbols.com/

Overview

This 5 step guide is about using images and symbols to help with communication when speaking and understanding may be difficult.

It is a short introduction to visual aids and their use in caring situations, designed for those supporting adults when conversations are hard, due to challenging settings, physical, sensory and/or cognitive difficulties.

Study Times



The training is divided into topics. Each topic will take around 30 minutes to complete, with discussion times highlighted by the symbol of a tutor and student.

Objectives

- Gain a basic understanding about communication and active listening to build conversations
- Make use of free images and symbols with labels, phrases and sentences to support communication in different settings
- Encourage conversations to support well being.

Contents

The five topics can be dipped into at any stage and need no prior knowledge.

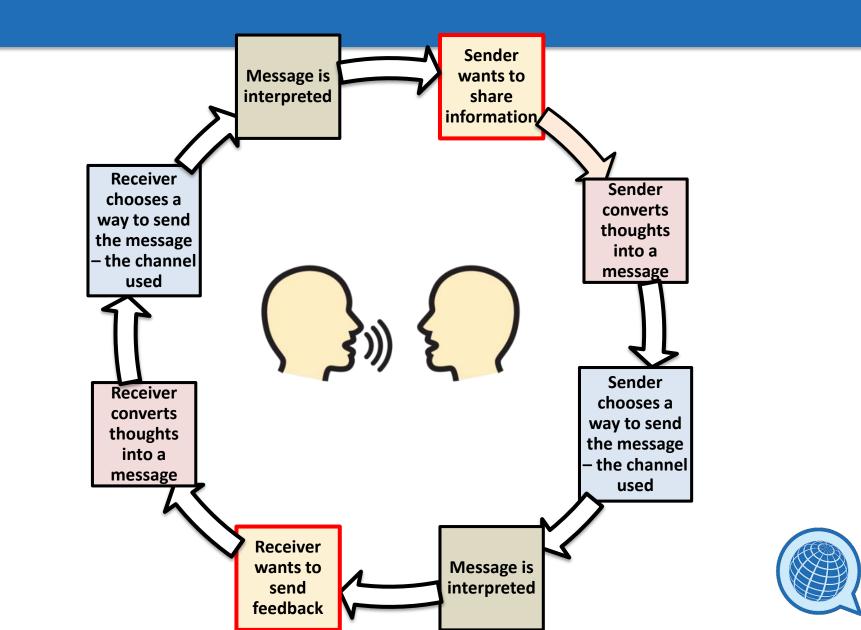
They include:

- **1**. How we communicate
- 2. Managing conversations
- **3**. Finding the right words and images
- 4. Adapting images and symbols for each individual
- 5. Creating opportunities to encourage conversations.

There are some activities, case studies and examples of communication boards and information charts with most steps.

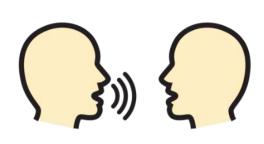


1. How we communicate...





- Communication happens when we send and receive messages using different channels.
- The channels may be face to face, writing or involve the use of technology.
- We need to be able to create and understand messages and find the best way to tell or express our thoughts, needs and emotions.









Message breakdown

There are several reasons communication or the messages we send and receive fail. Have a look at this video and think about the ways the conversation failed at times.

https://youtu.be/80x5LhIJSBE







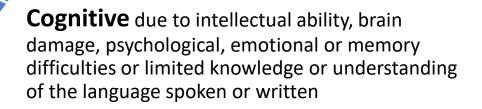
Barriers to Communication



Situation due to noise, distance and the way a message is sent or when you cannot understand what is being said e.g. messages are muffled - everyone is wearing personal protective equipment or masks or the technology used is not available or breaks down so the message is lost.

> **Physical** because of a functional difficulty such as moving the mouth, palate, tongue, vocal chords or breathing in a coordinated way or ability to show facial expressions. Even a lack of gestures can make communication harder at times.

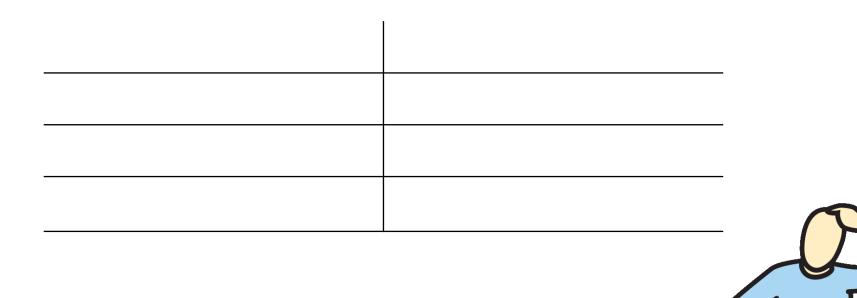
Sensory due to deafness, a hearing impairment or lack of feeling around the face or other parts of the body that are needed for communication.





Other ways we can communicate...

- Can you think of more ways we might communicate with people to overcome these difficulties?
- Make a short list of some examples





Let's discuss more ways we can send a message that might be better understood.

gesturesposturesigningsoundseye contactspacefacial expressiondrawingtouchwritingbody movementsymbols

pictures photographs emojis objects technology



Is it possible to communicate these messages without speaking?

- Find someone to chat with and use a different form of communication for each of these messages...
 - Gesture I fell off my bicycle and hurt my knee.
 - Drawing I need to walk home now.
 - Facial Expression I am tired and want to go to sleep.
 - Emojis on a phone I do not like being cold.





- Did you find you might have given clues by mixing different ways of communicating?
- Were you more comfortable using certain types of communication to get your message across?
- Did the person who was your 'communication partner' have to ask for any help to understand the sentences?



2. Managing Conversations

When you are talking to someone, how do you find out the things you want to know?

- Do you know how to **really** listen carefully?
- Do you think they felt that you had understood them?
- How did you know they had really understood you?
- Have you thought how culture, language and any personal issues might affect the conversation?



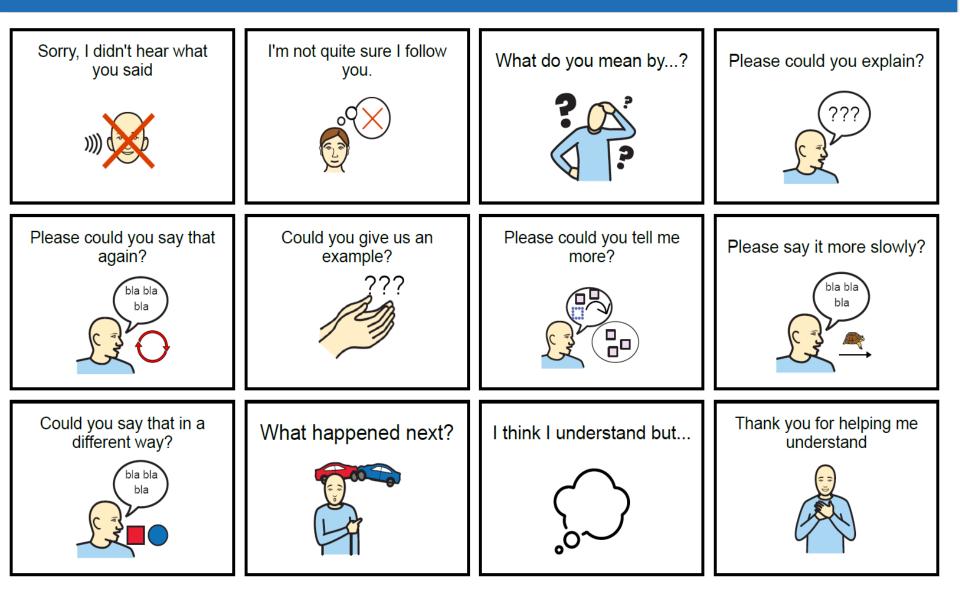


Conversations may be:

- short, because of an instant need such as an emergency (pain, hygiene, discomfort, anxiety or other emotions) and can also be confusing.
- linked to functional requirements, such as the toilet, but may need more supporting to understand real need.
- about something that has to be explained in more detail. Need more time and pauses to find out more.
- about instructions that can be helped with visual aids using images, written words or phrases alongside all the other interactions we have discussed.



Clarifying Communication with images





- It is better to say if you are unsure about what has been said.
- You may need to ask the speaker to repeat a part of what they have said, so start to say their message and pause to see if they clarify.
- Ask if you really heard what was said correctly if you cannot prompt them.
- Can they give you an example of the situation or item required etc?
- Try to use an open question that means the speaker has to say more than a Yes/No answer



Impact of not being listened to...

Think of an occasion when you told someone something important, but felt that you were not listened to...



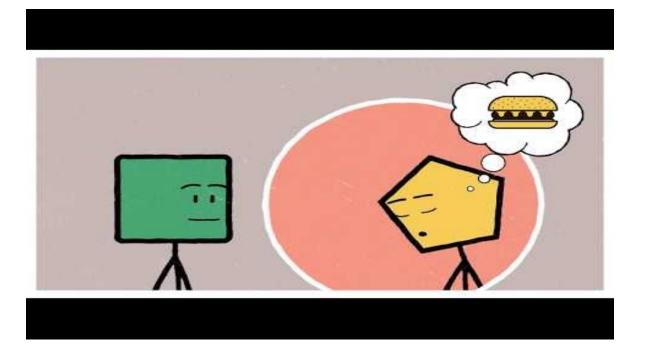
- What made you think you were not being understood?
- How did it make you feel?





Confirm your thoughts

- Watch this short video to see what else you can do to be an active listener.
- https://youtu.be/0nmJW_zExk0





3. Finding the right words and images

- There are many words that you will know you need to use every day when working with clients.
- These words and ones that are complex may be the most important words that need images to help understanding.
- The images can be drawings, symbols, icons, signs or photos.
- They may represent a phrase or a single word, such as an action, object, person, expression or feeling.
- Not every word has to be linked to a symbol in an information sheet. It is the main concept or idea that is important.

How could you help Amara?



Amara Nurse

Personal Data

AGE: 30

ADDRESS: University Hospital, Hampton Cross, Birmingham JOB: Accident and Emergency Nurse

HOBBIES: Dancing, socialising, cooking with friends and family.

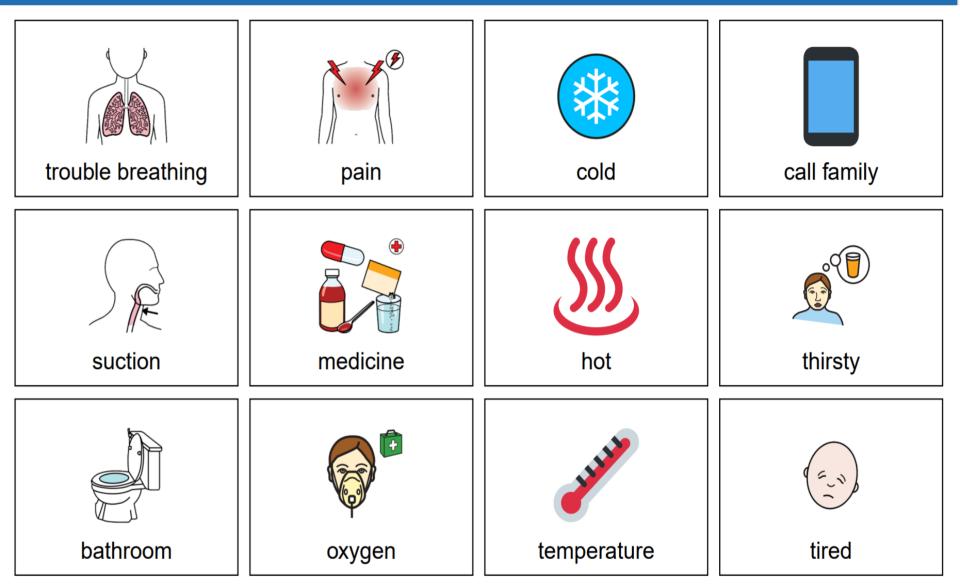
Background

Amara works long hours in A&E and has taken on more duties during the pandemic. She loves dancing Zumba and Salsa with a wide circle of friends if she has time off. Family breaks are also important, cooking and sharing dishes from her homeland, as well as getting out into the countryside. She is a chatty person, full of fun and keen to make the most of life. Despite PPE and taking care, one day she tested positive for COVID-19. She became anxious, could not sleep with respiratory difficulties worsening over four days. She was admitted to ICU on becoming delirious and had mechanical ventilation. Her involuntary movements caused concern and she appeared to be unable to understand or speak. After 3 weeks medication and management of breathlessness, she began to respond to treatment with good eye contact and improving voluntary movements, but speech remained difficult.



- Use of gestures in particular thumbs up or down, nodding etc.
- Initially use larger pictures or symbols to help understanding.
- Make sure instructions and requests are simple, repeated if necessary. Pause to check for understanding.
- Progress to communication boards with choices, if Amara still cannot write. Allow for pointing and indicate yourself what you mean when you want Amara to make choices.
- Gather more symbol topic boards, rather than an alphabet board, in the early days. Encourage conversation, but be aware that Amara may tire quickly
- Try pauses. Allow time for spoken replies as speech returns
- Offer clear explanations for complex subjects, even asking questions in a different way, remembering Amara is a nurse.

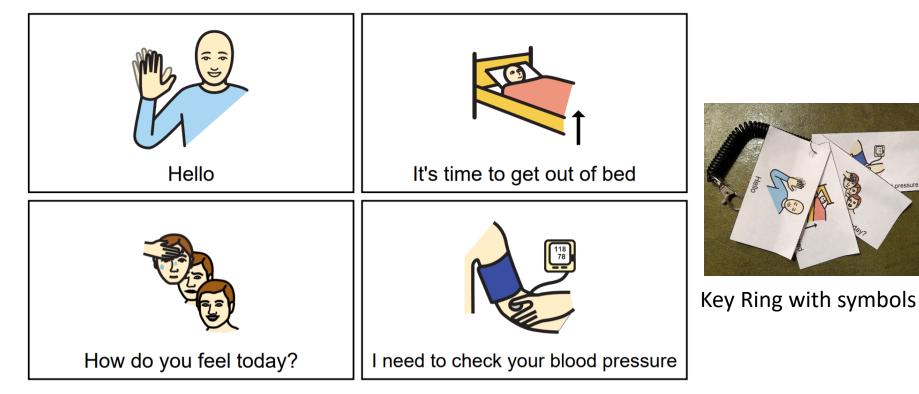
Examples of images that might go with questions about health





Individual cards

Individual cards



Sometimes simple flash cards with phrases that can be cut up and put on a key ring can help.



Topic based words and phrases

Sample topic words you may find useful when providing care that can be used on cards, communication boards etc

	Food	Drink	Clothes	Medical	Body	Actions
	bread	alcohol	belt	blood pressure	abdomen	choking
	butter	chocolate	coat	dizzy	arm	comb hair
	cereal	coca cola	gloves	fit	back	drowsy
	chips	coffee	hat	gagging	body	go home
	cold meal	cold drink	jacket	headache	face	go to sleep
	dessert	horlicks	jumper	injection	feet	lights off
	eggs	hot drink	pyjamas	light headed	fingers	lights on
	fish	ice	scarf	medication	hair	make a call
	fruit	juice	shirt	mouth wash	hands	massage
	hot meal	milk	shoes	nauseous	head	quiet
	meat	tea	slippers	pain	legs	read
	snack	water	socks	respiratory	neck	rest
	sugar	bottle	trousers	short of breath	nose	sit up
	toast	can	T-shirt	sick	stomach	tired
	vegetables	glass	underwear	suction	teeth	turned



Words and Phrases

More words...

				Personal	
Feelings	Daily Life/Time	Things	People/chat	Hygiene	Places/transport
afraid	bed changing	blanket	carer	bath	cinema
angry	bedtime	cigarette	chaplain	bathroom	countryside
anxious	breakfast	comb	children	bed pan	home
better	change clothes	glasses	doctor	clean	hospital
cold	cut toenails	hairbrush	family	shampoo	library
comfortable	exercise	handkerchief	friends	shower	park
disappointed	get dressed	lighter	nurse	tissue	pub
frustrated	get out of bed	lotion	social worker	toilet	restaurant
happy	listen to music	mobile phone	therapist	tooth brush	shops
hot	lunch	money	don't know	urinal	theatre
hungry	prayer	newspaper	don't want	wash body	town
lonely	supper	paper	good bye	wash face	ambulance
sad	teatime	pen	hello	wash hair	bus
thirsty	now	pillow	please	wash hands	car
unsure	later	tablet	thank you	wet	taxi

How could you help John?



John Joiner

Personal Data

AGE: 55

ADDRESS: Upper Street, London JOB: Joiner / Carpenter HOBBIES: Making things, DIY, meeting friends in the pub, films.

Background

John lived in London and at an early age was involved with the family joinery business. The small firm was like a family and John often enjoyed time out with colleagues. He also spent weekends doing DIY on the family home and always felt that he had kept himself fit, so it was a shock to them all when he woke up one morning with a blinding headache and was unable to speak coherently. The ambulance was called and he spent time undergoing tests that indicated he had suffered a stroke and had Aphasia. His mobility initially affected, improved over time and John clearly understood what was happening around him. He indicated a considerable degree of frustration and felt trapped by his disability. He still has word finding difficulties, often repeats himself and cannot cope in busy social settings. He has begun to become isolated and depressed. Writing remains difficult and he finds communication tiring. Using the tools of his trade is impossible, even after months of rehabilitation.

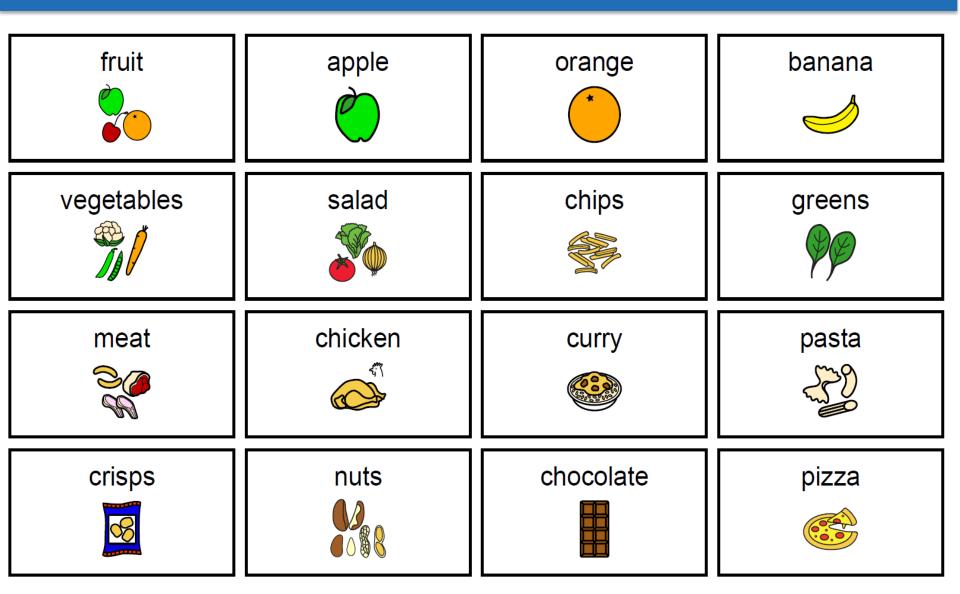


Communication Strategy for John

- Start asking questions that need more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer when John is not too tired, in order to encourage word finding.
- Provide images / symbols and objects to help when naming something is difficult and start a phrase that gives John a prompt for words e.g. You said you like fruit... is that an apple or Pause and wait to see if John can offer another fruit. If not, show an image of several pieces of fruit or the actual items.
- Try repeating the type of question that results in an answer you have already requested, so John practices words he knows. For example people and pet names – have photographs of family, well known places etc. to use with gesturing and encouraging. Use music with lyrics you John likes.
- Help develop short sentences by showing a topic board with key words in place – this can be done using technology such as a tablet or paper based boards.
- Encourage reading with matching words and phrases to images and try other letter and word games. Relaxed repetition is key.



Food Topic Board



Daily Topic Board





Find images online that can be shared with others.

Make sure they are copyright free (you have permission) to use them.

You can search and download symbols for free using Global Symbols <u>https://globalsymbols.com/</u> (You will need to create an account and use a password word)

		Global Symbols
		Create account
		First Name * Surname *
Hello	How do you feel?	Company Preferred Language
		English Symbols will be shown in your preferred language where possible.
		Email Address *
		Password * Confirm Password *
hot	cold	6 characters minimum Create Account

4. Adapting symbols and images



- Choose symbols and images that make the meaning easy to guess
- Avoid clutter keep symbols and images simple with clear backgrounds
- Try to use a single style on a board or information sheet so symbols have a similar look and feel.
- Use good colour contrast black and white may be easier for some users.
- Large clear text is needed, especially where labels are being used alongside the symbols.

How could you help Karl?



Karl Unemployed

Personal Data AGE: 50 ADDRESS: St Stephens Close, Ipswich JOB: Unemployed HOBBIES: Reading, watching TV collecting films .

Background

Karl has Cerebral Palsy and lives independently in a flat provided by Social Services. He uses a wheelchair for mobility over any distance, although he can stand to transfer and take a few steps. As he ages his communication has deteriorated, he has suffered several chest infections that affected his wellbeing, his speech has been impacted by having several teeth removed and his cognitive ability including memory has become less accurate. As a result, when he fell ill, he found it difficult to both remember all the words and phrases he needed, and his articulation made the production of multi-syllabic words unclear and many of his carers found it hard to discuss his medication, treatment and social needs with him.

Karl can comfortably use an iPad to type, but can be slow when he is tired, he gets frustrated when people do not understand what he is trying to say



Communication strategy for Karl

- Use symbols to communicate complex terms and phrases to carers and support understanding.
- Integrate speech, gesture and images so Karl can use the most suitable channel according to his needs and current status.
- Choose topic boards or flash cards that are specific to his current social setting, interest and topic of conversation.
- Make sure instructions and requests are repeated or said in a slightly different or more accurate way to encourage Karl and ensure understanding.
- Allow time for Karl to try to respond and initiate using different channels.
- Expand vocabulary to support Karl's needs.
- Try to make the most of the technology Karl wants to use with interesting images and topics.

Information sheets to help understanding

*	Have you got Long COVID? https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coron avirus-covid-19/long-term-effects-of- coronavirus-long-covid/	
	Often feeling very tired	
×	Being breathless	
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~	Muscle weakness	*
	Joint pain	
	Brain fog	
	Low mood	

You can use a word processor to make a table or columns with images, words and phrases or use an app.

Lockdown <del>×</del> 🖸 put on a mask if you Stay at home go out Exercise with one Keep safe distance * apart person Only essential Only essential travel shopping No indoor Don't meet up with entertainment lots of people

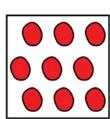


# Talking whilst using images

- As you talk, point to the images or symbols that represent important words in your sentence
- Pause to check your client is following your finger and is near enough to the board to point or indicate with their eyes, facial expression or gesture they have understood.









 You don't have to point at everything on the board – not all the words are included as images or symbols.

#### How could you help Sarah?



Jnemployed

Personal Data

ADDRESS: St Benedict's Home, Itchen Rd, Southampton JOB: Was a Farmer HOBBIES: Reading, horses, TV.

#### Background

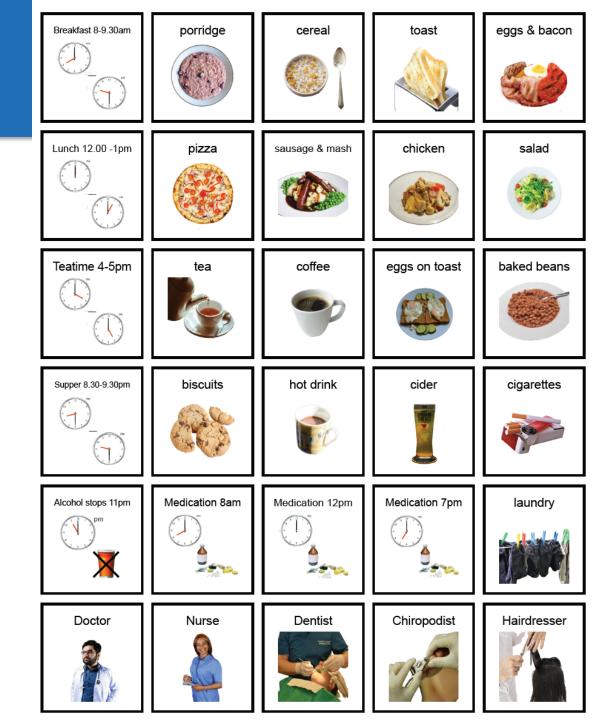
Sarah was born in England, but spent most of her life farming in South Africa and loved her horses. She returned to England and life became much harder, eventually spiraling down into alcoholism. Although relatively independent, the family felt she was safer living in sheltered accommodation where she could receive regular medication and control her drinking and epilepsy. Sarah now has severe fits and during these episodes becomes confused and incoherent. Carers find they cannot always get through to her with speech alone and she does not appear to listen to instructions that can result in her failing to understand she must ring a bell when she feels she is going to fall. There are times when she does not realise that she needs to schedule in mealtimes, showers and other daily living requirements.



- Use of gestures and body language to reinforce verbal instructions – allow space and time when struggling to be coherent.
- Target flash cards with symbols or images to go with instructions needed at the time – possibly use a key ring. Take photos of familiar objects.
- Have daily schedules ready with meal times etc and options available when necessary.
- Update topic boards and settings as situations change.
- Possibly use a tablet, so cards and boards can be swiped through quickly.

# Sarah's personal chart

This board provides some of the important reminders for Sarah's daily schedule to help her when feeling unwell.



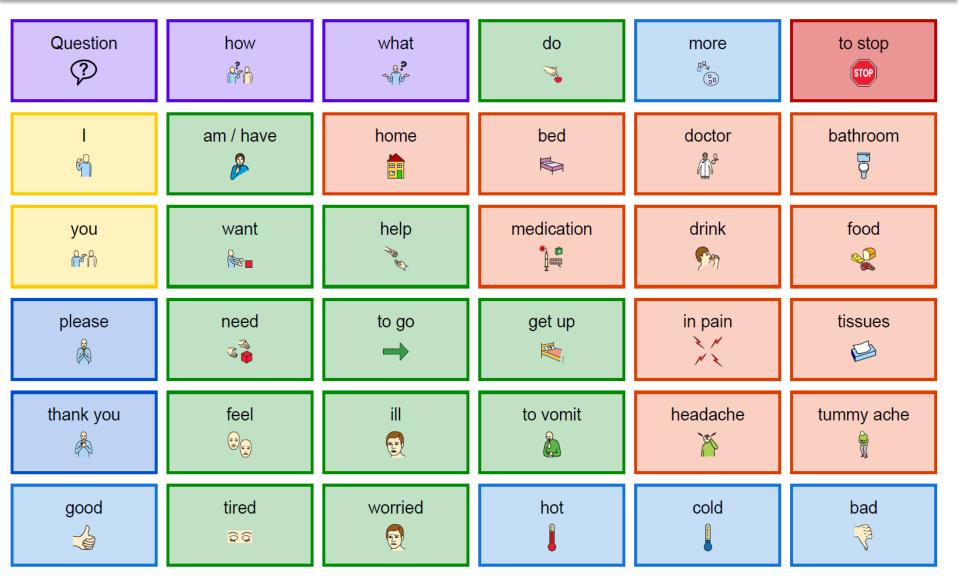
## A Sentence or Phrase Practice board

If English is not a first language or someone is learning the language, cells can be coloured by the type of word (part of speech) to help to say them in the right order, so they are more easily understood.

People choose different colours, but here are some examples

- yellow for pronouns e.g. I, you, she, he, we, they
- green for actions e.g. go, walk, talk, help, come
- blue for descriptions e.g. hot, cold, little, large
- soft orange for objects or people e.g. table, chair, friends
- purple for questions e.g. who? what? when? where? why? how?
- Check how easy it is to make phrases or sentences using a test board in English – the order may change in other languages.

## Can you make some phrases or sentences by pointing at the symbols or words?



## 5. Creating opportunities to encourage conversations.

Finding topics that can lead to conversations and discovering ways of communicating ...

- What do they like to do?
  - How do they show that they like or are enjoying something?
- What do they dislike/not like to do?
  - How do they show that they dislike or are not enjoying something?
- Who are the important people in their life?
- In a typical week/month where do they spend their time – list all that apply.

#### **Considering different types of boards**

- Some boards may have too many symbols or words and be hard to read at a distance.
- Larger text with less cells containing images on one page may be necessary,
- Too many choices can cause confusion if a client has 'brain fog', dementia or a cognitive impairments
- Think about using half a page (A5) with images on both sides that may be easier to handle if dexterity is a problem, or you only have one free hand.





#### **Ideas for creating Conversations**

- Good conversations can mean that there is a chance to use what are known as 'open questions and comments'. Not just ones that need a 'yes / no' answer.
- Think how to add new topics...
  - that reminds me of...
  - that makes me think of ...

who? what? when? where? why? how?

Have images, music, other objects at the ready.



## Remembering to listen and pay attention as well as question

 Listen carefully, pausing and clarifying by asking questions such as ....

"Can I just check that I've understood this correctly? You have said that...";

"Let me check that I'm clear about your difficulty. You tell me that...";

"I want to be sure I understand what you mean...";

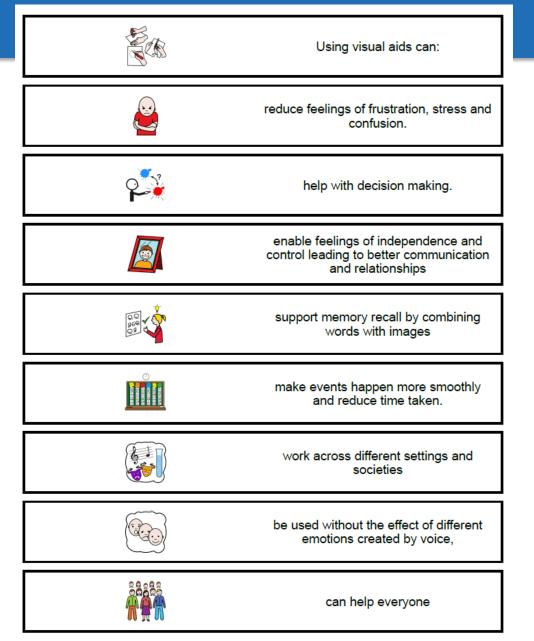
"What you seem to be saying is...";

"Could you tell me more about..."



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#### **Supporting Spoken Communication**





## Using Board Builder and Symbol Creator https://globalsymbols.com/

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Once you have an account on Global Symbols you can use "Board Builder" (select from the top menu) to make a communication board. Use 'My Board Sets' button to start making a board.



Start with a template or make your own layout

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#### **Board Builder**

 Select 'Create Board Set', choose a template and set up a board set, then start your first board and set up the boards properties, number of columns and rows required, plus the position of the label. Use the 'done' button to go to the board properties

My Board Sets

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	Choose a name for the first Board in 4 / 250 your new Board Set.	Optional. Shown in PDFs made 14 / 250 from this Board.	5	Board Properties		×
z	Layout			Title * Test	Description This is a test	
	Generic Templates	Custom Settings		1. DO AND.	Optional. Shown in PDFs made from this Board.	14 / 2
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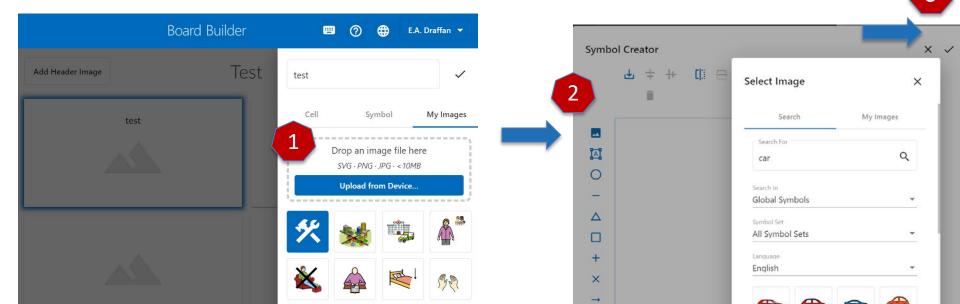
#### Add a Label and Symbol

• Select a cell, add a word where it says label on the right, the cell will be greyed out while you type in the word. Then search for a symbol

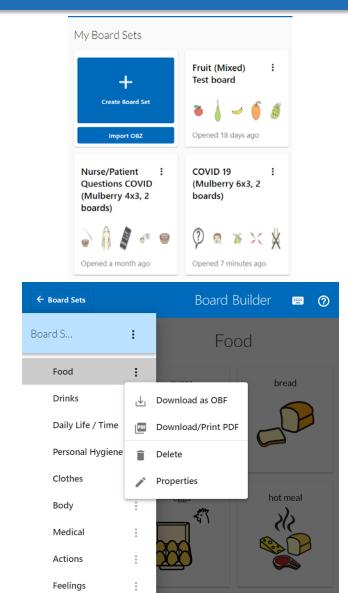
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		Clear Symbol Clear Colours		M 🛃 🔜 🐭



- You can make your own image or symbol by going to 'My Images' and choosing the blue button (hammer/spanner).
- Upload your image or search for a symbol and add shapes etc. Select the 'tick' to add it to the board



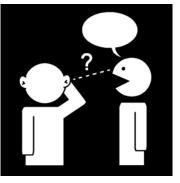
## Finishing the Board and Printing.



- The board you are making will always be automatically saved to the 'My board sets area. You can go back and edit at any time.
- Make it public if you want to share it with others by going back to the board properties
- Save it as a 'obf' file if you want to upload it to <u>Cboard</u> or <u>CoughDrop</u> communication apps or print it out as a PDF for laminating.

## **Final Tips**







- Keep it simple a piece of paper with a few pictures may be all that is needed when speech does not come easily.
- It may be simpler just to use key words
- Pause wait try not to cut in when someone is trying to express themselves – help with gentle prompts around the subject if word finding is difficult.
  - Help by talking about the concepts/ ideas behind complex words rather than using them or expecting answers about them

## **More Instructions and Training**

- Keyboard access, more instructions and language changes for Board Builder and Symbol Creator can be found on the Board Builder menu bar.
- Global Symbols courses have more information about making boards and other visual aids. <u>https://training.globalsymbols.com/course/view.php</u> ?id=57
- Ace Centre course for communication partners. <u>https://acecentre.org.uk/learning/communication-partners-i</u>
- CALL Scotland about communication and AAC. <u>https://www.aacscotland.org.uk/modules/</u>



## Useful images and cards online

- Finding free photos to print out as cards if these are not available from family <u>https://pixabay.com/</u>
- More black and white icons <u>https://thenounproject.com/</u>
- Working with children more ideas on Lesson <u>https://lessonpix.com/</u>

 Communication support for stroke patients <u>https://www.stroke.org.uk/what-is-</u> <u>aphasia/communication-tools</u>





channel	The way a message might be sent such as via speaking in a language which may or may not be understood by the receiver, email, SMS, phone etc
cognitive	Related to the ability to learn, reason, think, remember, have language skills and appropriate social skills.
convert	To change, adapt or translate a message into another form such as text or images from spoken language or just an idea in the head.
degenerative	An illness that gets worse with loss of function (physical and/or cognitive).
interpret	To understand or work out the meaning of a message
Motor Neurone Disease (MND)	Affects the brain and nerves causing muscle weakness, difficulty with mobility, swallowing and speech
physical	These difficulties are to do with the body's mobility, dexterity and function of the organs
rehabilitate	restore (someone) to health or normal life by training and therapy after imprisonment, addiction, or illness.
sensory	The five senses humans have: touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste.
visual aids	Use of images, symbols, emojis, icons to help make the spoken word or text easier to understand.



## From the Global Symbols Team

To use this free course online, download boards and other resources, please create accounts on Global Symbols and the training site

https://globalsymbols.com/users/sign_up?locale=en

https://training.globalsymbols.com/course/index.php?categoryid=12

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