Engaging effectively through 2-way communication

Good practice for engaged behaviour support

planning and implementation

**The
Right
Direction**

Working together on positive
behaviour support (PBS)

Meeting the communication needs of others as a behaviour support practitioner

In your work as a behaviour support practitioner, you will communicate with many different people – all of whom have different communication needs, preferences and styles.

This document introduces some types of 2-way communication that are important in behaviour support planning and implementation.

Some of these communication styles you will be more experienced with; you may even use them as your own preferred communication style.

This might include:

- speaking and listening,

- using and reading body language, or

- writing and reading.

You will also use techniques everyday you may not be aware of, such as reading lips to help you understand speech more clearly or using different words to explain information if someone doesn't understand.

An essential part of communicating during the behaviour support process is checking in with the person you are communicating with to make sure you are both understanding and being understood. This is what we mean by effective 2-way communication and it underpins the behaviour support process.

Communication is a 2-way process of sending and receiving information.

The information you try to send may not always be understood as you intended.

Checking in

Part of effective 2-way communication is looking for signs that you are – or are not – effectively communicating. There are usually signs a person doesn't understand.

This may mean you need to adapt your communication to best engage with different people.

Making sure the person understands – especially if they are a participant working with you on their behaviour support plan – is essential. It upholds their rights and ensures they have the option to draw on their support network if needed.

Communicating in different ways

As a behaviour support practitioner, you might work with people who have limited speech.

This means you'll need to communicate in different ways to make sure the behaviour support process runs smoothly and upholds the person with disability's rights.

The person you are working with might use a variety of ways to communicate information.

This can include:

- communication boards or books with pictures on them,

- Key Word Sign (sometimes called KWS),

- natural gestures,

- facial expressions and

- body language.

These methods are called **alternative and augmentative communication (AAC)**.

It is essential that you know the ways that the person you are supporting communicates.

Effective communication between the two of you is how you, as a practitioner:

- establish rapport,

- build trust,

- understand the person's wants and needs,

- get the correct information for the plan and

- connect socially.

Your ability to **adapt to the person's communication style** will result in more meaningful and effective interactions, and – essentially – a more effective behaviour support plan.

Types of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC)

There are 2 main types of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) strategies: *unaided* and *aided*.

Unaided alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) strategies

Unaided AAC strategies do not use an external aid. The person generally uses their own body to communicate.

For example:

- body language (e.g., crossing arms to show discomfort)

- facial expression (e.g., clenching their jaw to show anger)

- eye contact (e.g., making eye contact to show they are willing to engage with you)

- natural gestures (e.g., nodding head to indicate 'yes')

- Key Word Sign, where key words in conversation are combined with a manual sign that adds visual information to help you engage.

Aided alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) strategies

Aided alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) strategies use an external item to communicate. Aided alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) can be classified as either *low tech* or *high tech*.

Some examples of low-tech alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) are:

- **Objects.** Using objects that they can point to or see to increase the person's understanding. For example, a towel that smells like chlorine for swimming.

- **Communication books or boards.** This can be single or multiple pages. Words and/or sentences are represented by symbols (written words, photos and symbol/image sets). You can each point to these or look at them to help you communicate.

- **Alphabet boards.** This is a single page printed keyboard that people can use to spell their message.

- **Pen and paper** for writing.

Some examples of high-tech alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) are:

- **iPad, tablet or smart phone with a specialised communication app** (eg: Proloquo2go). Within the app, a person can type or select what they want to say. The tablet or device then speaks the message.

- **Speech generating device (communication device).** A person can type or select what they want to say in several ways:

  - by touching the device screen,

  - using their eyes to select a message or

  - using a switch connected to the device.

These various ways of using the device are referred to as *access methods*.

The device then speaks the message using a synthesised or computer-generated voice.

Key takeaways for behaviour support practitioners

- Do not assume that someone who does not talk *cannot communicate*, as they may use other forms of communication.

- You need to tune in to the subtle ways someone communicates their preferences.
For some people this might be through body language and facial expression. You can do this by (for example):

  - Spending time with the person.

  - Talking with people who know them well.

  - Looking at their personal communication dictionary.

- If the person you are supporting uses a particular alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) system, spend time finding out how this system works. You can talk to their speech pathologist and find information and videos online.

  - Consider how the alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) system can be adapted to have conversations about behaviour support, e.g., key words related to behaviour support added to the person's

communication app so the person can learn how to use them and their meaning (e.g., assessment, behaviour, strategy, etc.).

- Make sure to include information about the person's alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) systems and how it is currently being used in your documentation, including the behaviour support plan.

- Some people may be in the process of learning how to use alternative and augmentative communication (AAC). If this is the case for the person you are supporting, it is important for you to know how to support their learning and be a part of supporting it.

- This might include using their alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) system when speaking with them to show them how it works. This is referred to as modelling the use of the communication system.

- You might consider including the learning of the communication system into the person's behaviour support plan as a quality-of-life strategy, or the use of the communication system for the person to learn an alternative communication strategy that can replace the

need for them to exhibit behaviour of concern to demonstrate a need, want or preference.

- Make sure the person's alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) system is available to you when you are interacting with them. Remind the person and their supporters to bring the system along with them to activities involving you. If they don't have it, have a 'Plan B' in place, i.e., another communication strategy familiar to the person that you can adopt to facilitate meaningful engagement.

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