

Speech and Language Therapy Department

Communication Dictionaries

What is a Communication Dictionary?

A Communication Dictionary has the following functions;

- Records what the service user does to communicate
- What the communication usually means and
- How the communication partner should respond to the service user.

Service users use many methods to express their needs and wants (e.g. body movements, vocalisations, behaviours).

Some people use communication signals that can have more than one meaning. Other people may use some verbal communication but their attempts might not be understood by everyone. A Communication Dictionary documents all the ways a person chooses to communicate. This information can then be shared and understood consistently by the relevant people in the person's life.#

How to create a communication dictionary?

1. Make sure you know the Service user well, spending time with them and observing them in different situations.
2. Identify and describe all the ways Service user uses to communicate (where it happens, when it happens, what the communication looks like etc.). Check the accuracy of this with the people who know the Service user best.
3. Record and interpret what the communication might mean. Consider whether the communication signal means the same thing in all settings.
4. Develop the Personal Communication Dictionary by writing the information you have gathered in the first person. It might be helpful to divide the dictionary into sections (e.g. mealtimes, social, personal care).
5. Inform others of the Personal Communication Dictionary and make sure there is a copy kept in their file.

6. It can be helpful to review the dictionary at team meetings/training days to ensure any new information or alterations are received.
7. The Dictionary should travel with Service user and should be reviewed and updated regularly.

Communication Dictionary Template

What I do/ say	What this might mean	What you should do

Example of a communication dictionary:

What I do/ say	What this might mean	What you should do
I make the lámh sign for book	I want to show you my communication book as there is a message from home	Staff should read the message out loud in front of me Offer me the chance to show my friends and other staff
Shrug my shoulders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I need help making a decision • I need clearer options • I may need some more convincing • I need to be told the plan and then I will decide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff should speak clearly and support me by using visuals if needed • Tell me the plan and give me some time to decide
I use the lámh sign for friend and/ or point at an person of a similar age to me	I enjoy interacting with and making friends with people in and around the same age as me, particularly those who dress similarly to me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask me questions about the people I am pointing to (e.g. 'Is that your friend?') • If possible allow me to greet the person myself
I stand in the living room or come into the staff office	I may be looking for staff interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask me if I am okay • I might want 1:1 time with staff • I may want to watch TV • Give me some options and allow me time to respond
I become quiet and might hold my belly	I may have a belly ache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask me if I have a belly ache • Ask me if I want a paracetamol

This document was created by the Speech and Language Therapy Department of St. Michael's House.