

## HEALTH & SAFETY: BASIC COMMUNICATION

*BQIS/Outreach Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life.*

### Objectives

Readers will learn to identify two types of Communication Systems.

Readers will learn to identify which type of communication system an individual is using.

Readers will learn to teach communication, including what to teach, when to teach, and how to reinforce learning.

### Definitions

**Communication:** A process by which information is exchanged between two or more individuals through a common set of behaviors or symbols.

#### TYPES OF COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

**Receptive Language:** Ability to understand or comprehend language. It usually refers to the ability to understand verbal expression, but it also includes the ability to understand sign language, writing, Braille and other forms of language including what is commonly referred to as “body language”.

**Expressive Language:** Ability to express oneself. This usually refers to language expression through speech, but it also includes gestures, sign language, use of a communication board, body language, touch, and other forms of expression.

### Facts

- The ability to ask for things is one of the most basic units of communication. This is typically the first type of communication developed. For example, a child may say “milk” when he wants milk and “juice” when he wants juice. Often times “nonsense” words are used in these early attempts at communication, an example being “goink” for “drink”.
- All persons should be assisted in having a means to expressively communicate at minimum: pain/hurt/sick, hungry, thirsty, cold, hot, toilet, need help, leave me alone, and tired/need break. However, these basic needs should be trained in addition to ways to better express desired activities.

- Communication occurs primarily through sights and sounds; however touch plays an important role for those who are blind.
- Receptive Language typically develops at a faster pace than Expressive Language.
- When speaking with an individual with an Intellectual Disability, allow time for a response.
- Gestures, images/pictures, and/or verbal repetition often improves the individual's receptive understanding.
- Some ways individuals communicate expressively:
  - Crying
  - Sounds
  - Pointing
  - Falling Asleep
  - Screaming
  - Silence
  - Communication Devices
  - Gestures/signing
  - Self injurious behavior
  - Body position
  - Pausing
  - Eye Contact or facial expressions

## Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

### 1. Teaching Expressive Communication:

- Identify what the individual likes (preferences) and/or items that the individual frequently asks for, such as toileting, calls home, water, or breaks.
- By identifying preferred and frequently used objects and activities, one can more easily identify when to teach and what to reinforce the learning with. For example, the following steps could be used if you are teaching someone to use a picture of a telephone to indicate "I want to call home":
  - Simply show the picture of the telephone, and then provide the call home immediately following the picture. This will pair the picture with the object or activity. Practice pairing at least daily or as often as possible.
  - Prompt the individual to go get the picture of the telephone and bring it to staff. Again staff would immediately provide the call home following the appropriate response.
  - Respond to any self-initiated communication of the individual bringing the picture of the telephone to staff by providing a call home.
- If you use things the individual already likes to build communication, the individual will be more motivated to learn, and staff and family will have some guidelines about when they may teach and how to reinforce the learning.
- Teaching a language system often requires many repetitions, therefore one should choose objects or activities that occur frequently throughout a typical day and teach communication during the times that these activities naturally occur.
- In order to be most effective, one should clearly identify the following three aspects of the communication training:
  - When to teach/ how to prompt the wanted response
  - What behavior or response is wanted
  - What reinforcement will follow the wanted communicative response

## 2. Teaching Receptive Communication:

- Present the individual an object along with verbal and gestural communication in order to give the person more information about what is being said to them verbally.
- Use specific touch cues over and over when giving an individual directions or information about an upcoming event.
- Use appropriate gestures when verbally giving information regarding an upcoming event or when giving directions.
- It is critical that everyone in the person's life use the same method of teaching that is gestures, touch cues and verbalizations, in order for the individual to begin to associate the Symbol/Cue with a specific action or activity
- Communication strategies should be included in the ISP and developed by the Interdisciplinary team (IST).
- Remember that people are already communicating; we just may not be familiar with their system.

## Learning Assessment

Questions that can be used to verify a person's competency in the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. What are the two types of Communication Systems?
  - A. English and Spanish
  - B. Expressive and Receptive
  - C. Nouns and Verbs
2. Where is the best place to begin to teach a language system?
  - A. Teaching what an individual already likes and uses often
  - B. Teaching manners, such as "please" and "thank-you"
  - C. Teaching something that is abstract just as the concept of "more", "yes" or "no"
3. When an individual exhibits the appropriate communicative response, staff should:
  - A. Tell the individual to "wait a minute" and walk away.
  - B. Review the communication plan.
  - C. Provide immediate social reinforcement (smile, say "great") and quickly provided the object or activity requested to reinforce the appropriate response.
4. Communication training should:
  - A. Only occur once a month
  - B. Occur several times a day with all staff teaching using the same method
  - C. Only be done by a speech pathologist

Critical Thinking questions for thought and discussion:

5. If an individual points or stares towards a magazine, what may this gesture mean?
6. If an individual pulls staff's hair during a trip in a vehicle, what may this behavior mean?

## Related Resources

“AAC” Fact Sheet

### Learning Assessment Answers

1. B
2. A
3. C
4. B

## Outreach Services

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As a service for persons supporting individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, BQIS/ Outreach developed the Outreach Fact Sheet Library. The information provided is designed to enhance the understanding of the topic and does not replace other professional or medical instructions or individually developed plans. For more fact sheets and information, please visit [DDRSOutreach.IN.gov](http://DDRSOutreach.IN.gov).



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