

Communication Boards

What are they?

A communication board is a visual representation of language. It helps children better visualise and understand language. Communication boards focus on **core words** (common words that can be used in lots of different situations such as more, finished, go, stop, in, on, etc). They can help children to learn phrases and combine words into sentences.

Who are they for?

Communication boards are for everyone!

Because they are visual they can be used to help children process and understand verbal information and communicate effectively by providing an extra cue that both they and their communication partner can understand.

They are really helpful in supporting:

- ✓ Children or young people who have difficulties communicating using verbally (using words) – this may be that they are not yet communicating verbally at all, or they may have speech sound difficulties so really struggle to be understood by others.
- ✓ Children that have good picture recognition and can point to a picture or sequence of pictures to communicate a message.
- ✓ Children with difficulties processing and/or understanding language and need to have visuals used alongside spoken language to help them

How do you use them?

Communication boards have both words and pictures on them that link to language we use both in everyday life and during specific activities/games.

We need to be talking to the child using the communication board as well as spoken language!

While the aim is for the child to eventually **use** the communication board independently (or use alongside their own verbal communication), we cannot expect them to do this or even know how to do this without **showing them as often as possible**. This is known as **modelling** and is just like how we teach babies to talk, but with pictures as well as words!

Here's how to model/teach your child to use communication boards:

- Use the board to create simple messages during everyday situations and activities:
 - point to a picture to say that word or phrase e.g. *“more”* or *“I need help”*
 - point to 2 or more pictures to say a longer phrase or sentence e.g. *“I want + more + game”* or *“I have finished + let's do something else”*.
- The pictures are not just there to request – you should model and encourage your child to communicate a range of messages for a range of reasons **as well as requesting** such as:
 - To give **information/instructions** – e.g. *“let's go!”* or *“toy + there”*
 - To share **opinions** – e.g. *“I + like + game”*, *“not + good”* or *“I don't like it”*
 - To say how they are **feeling** – e.g. *“I feel ...”*
 - To **socialise** – e.g. *“I + share + you”*, *“let's play”*, *“how are you?”*

Key things to remember:

- Communication boards should be **within sight** and available to use **at all times**.
- **Model, model, model! and repeat, repeat, repeat!** Just like when teaching babies to talk, the more the child can see and hear the words and phrases over and over again, the more likely they are to learn and eventually start to use the words and phrases.
- Remember to **inspire don't require**. You should never want to force a child to communicate with you. Instead, you want to be strategic about choosing highly motivating activities and then **tempting them to communicate**. Some children pick this up right away while others may need time and lots of **modelling** and **repetition** before they get the hang of it (see above point).
- You do not have to point to every picture for what you are saying. Focus on the **main words**.
 - At this stage the focus is not on sentence structure, its about learning how to communicate effectively. The Speech and Language Therapist will advise when your child is ready to start working on things like grammar and sentence structure using the communication board.
 - For example, if you say “*get in the car now,*” you may point to: “get,” “in,” and “car.”
 - Consider making your phrases similar to your child’s communication abilities; if they communicate in mostly **1-2 word** phrases, **model 2-4 word** phrases/sentences.
- Some boards may be topic-specific but all of them will contain some **core words** that can be used in most day to day situations.
- You should always acknowledge **any attempt to communicate**. Even if they don’t use the communication board yet, you can still show them some of the things they can say using it, whilst providing a **good verbal language model at the same time**.
 - e.g. they may hold up a car to show you - you can respond by pointing to a word or phrase on the communication board e.g. “wow! Look at that”, “you like that car” or “let’s play with the car”
- You must also **acknowledge** and **model** correct production/word order **even when your child makes errors**.
 - e.g. if they point to “*more + want*” in the wrong order, you can model back the correct word/picture order: “oh you want more”
- If your child points to a picture then **say the word or phrase** and **expand by adding another word**.
 - e.g. if your child points to “*more*”. You can say and point to “*more + toy*” or “*you + want + more*”
- When you have spent lots and lots of time modelling the communication boards to your child, start to add a pause after your models to see if and how your child will respond.
 - e.g. “*Uh oh! The toy...*” if there’s no response you can add a prompt – e.g. “what happened to the toy!?...” if there is still no response, continue to model the phrase e.g. “the toy stopped!”

Final point: lots of parents are worried that communication boards will **prevent their child from talking**. Research shows that it’s actually the opposite. The more **strategic exposure to language** we give a child, the **more likely they will be to start verbally communicating**. Remember we are always using verbal communication alongside the communication boards, so they are being exposed to both methods (plus all of the non-verbal communication we don’t even realise we use!)

Examples of Communication boards:

Core words only:

who?	what?	where?	when?	help	finished
I, me, my	it	here	up	want	like
you, your	that	in	on	get	make
he, his	all	some	more	can	put
she, her	same	different	good	open	turn
why?	no, not	do	look	go	stop

Activity/topic specific (cars):

want 	beep 	go 	quickly
stop 	bus 	car 	slowly
more 	home 	school 	crash

Mixture of words and phrases (may be beneficial for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder who often learn language in phrases they have heard):

I, me, my	want	more/again	go	look at that
you, your	need	I have finished	stop	this is fun!
good	choose	let's do something else	I need help	I don't like it
place	game/toy	activity	I need a break	I feel...