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1031 Lucas Avenue
Victoria, BC V8X 5L2
Tel 250-595-2088

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Developing Functional Communication Skills

The following is a framework of functional communication skills that can provide a foundation for a formal communication system.

Functional Communication Skill	Example of Skill being Demonstrated
Awareness Shows awareness of another person, activity, object, sound, or voice	<i>Todd turns toward the educational assistant as she enters the room.</i>
Attention Seeking Initiates request for attention.	<i>Ella vocalizes to get the attention of another student.</i>
Preferences – Likes or Dislikes Indicates feelings (happiness, sadness, pleasure, displeasure). Shows pleasure/attention and displeasure/withdrawal for activities or objects.	<i>Dhruv smiles and increases physical tone when he sees his mother coming for him. Lily smiles when music is being played. Erin grimaces when drinking cold liquid.</i>
Acknowledgment Shows responsiveness to another person's communication.	<i>Ian smiles when someone comes up to him and comments on his new jacket.</i>
Requesting continuation of an activity Shows desire for an object or activity to continue when it has been discontinued.	<i>Kate uses an 'oo' sound to say that she wants 'more' when her snack is interrupted.</i>
Requesting an object or action Requests assistance from another person. Requests an object or activity ("I want").	<i>Cam uses a whining vocalization to request a position change. Taylor raises her arms to request a hug.</i>
Refusing or Rejecting a Person, Object, or Action	<i>Justin purses his lips and taps against EA's hand to say that he's had enough.</i>

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Shows rejection when offered an object/activity, or shows that they want to stop.	
Acceptance of a Single Object or Activity Choice Communicates that whatever is happening is okay or enjoyable. When offered an object or activity, the student indicates acceptance.	<i>Nathan smiles at a peer to let her know that he is enjoying hearing her read a story.</i> <i>When offered a spoonful of food, Jun-Seo opens his mouth.</i>
Anticipation Indicates a desire or dislike for an upcoming object/activity.	<i>Annie looks up, smiles, and increases physical tone in anticipation of going to the gym.</i>
Greetings/Farewells Responds in a consistent way to a variety of people when greeted.	<i>Zach smiles at his friend and says "Hi" with his Step-by-Step Communicator.</i>
Two-Object Choices Signals a choice between two objects/activities.	<i>When shown two activity choices, Aaliyah looks at the one she wants to do.</i>
Taking a Turn Responds when given an opportunity to take a turn.	<i>Ethan takes a turn to vocalize when having a conversation with another person.</i>
Multiple Object/Activity Choices Signals a choice between several objects/activities.	<i>Mei uses her head switch to give the number of 'beeps' associated with one of three activity choices.</i>
Two-Picture Choices Uses a signal to choose between two pictures.	<i>Priya looks at a photo of her side-lyer when asked to choose between it and her wheelchair for where she would like to be positioned.</i>

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Multiple-Picture Choices The student uses a signal to choose between several pictures.	<i>Maya touches a 'shopping' symbol from a choice of 4 leisure activities.</i>
Commenting Provides information spontaneously, or in response to another person's question. Names things around them, including using size, shape, possession, and location.	<i>Caleb picks up a picture of a muffin and shows it to another person.</i> <i>Maddie points to a picture of "Mom" when she sees her sister wearing her Mom's jacket.</i>
Requesting Information Initiates communication in order to get information or to get approval/non approval.	<i>When looking at a book with another student, Nora touches a picture on the page and looks at the student with a puzzled expression that is interpreted as meaning "What's that?"</i>
Responding "Yes"/ "No" The student has readable and reliable signals to indicate both a positive and a negative response to simple concrete questions pertaining to the here and now. The student responds with either a positive or negative signal to a question involving something that isn't immediately present.	<i>Annika smiles and looks at a book offered to her when asked, "Do you want to hear a story?"</i> <i>Kai grimaces and looks away when offered a drink.</i> <i>Sasha smiles and looks toward the door when asked, "Are you ready to go home yet?"</i>

Use the following checklist to evaluate if your student is demonstrating any communicative functions, and if so, in what contexts. If the student does not demonstrate certain communicative functions, they can be taught, generally in the order listed.

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Remember that these functions may be communicated in a variety of ways, such as smiling, frowning, crying, averted gaze, increased body movement or tone, increased respiration, 'shut down', etc.

's Communicative Functions		Date:
Communication Function	- if demonstrated	- to be targeted next
1. Awareness		
2. Attention Seeking		
3. Preferences – Likes/Dislikes		
4. Acknowledgment		
5. Requesting continuation – “More”		
6. Requesting Object or Action		
7. Refusing/Rejecting Person, Object, Action		
8. Acceptance/Single Object or Activity		
9. Anticipation		
10. Greetings/Farewells		
11. Two Object Choices		
12. Turn Taking		
13. Multiple Object/Activity Choices		
14. Two Picture Choices		
15. Multiple Picture Choices		
16. Commenting		

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17. Requesting Information		
18. Responding "Yes"/ "No"		