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Empowering the Student to be an Effective Communicator: Challenges and Suggestions

Challenge	How to Support Communication	Example
<p>Student has significant sensory impairments, and identifying a potential communication topic or partner is hard for them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the student know when you are present and when you are leaving, by providing verbal, visual, and/or physical cues, depending on the student’s needs. • Talk about or narrate what is happening in the environment. Bring things to the student, or move the student towards them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hi, Madison, it’s Ms. B”. Stand within the student’s optimal visual range if they have any vision. If vision and hearing are severely impaired, consider offering a distinguishing characteristic such as your bracelet for the student to feel so they can identify you. • “Madison, Jake is here to read with you.” Make sure the peer can be seen and/or heard by the student.
<p>Student appears passive or disinterested in communicating with others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a Personal Communication Dictionary to list all the ways the student communicates, and how to respond. Recognize and respond to all the student’s communication attempts. • Model ways to communicate with others by giving them an active role, such as vocalizing, using gestures, or selecting symbols. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student may move their hand to get attention. Communication partner will respond by saying, “Meena, I see you moving your hand. You’re saying you have something to tell me.” • “Hey, Trong, let’s go to Music. Point to “Go” on the student’s core board.

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<p>Student responds to others' communication, but may not initiate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model initiating, using the student's method of communication. • Wait for up to 10 seconds, and watch for subtle signs that the student is initiating. Recognize and respond to all possible initiations. • Use a Personal Communication Dictionary to ensure that the student's whole team, including peers, is aware of ways the student may initiate communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Hi, Mr. H!" Wave at Mr. H while making sure you are within the student's visual field. • When the student's hand moves, say, "Cole, you're moving your hand. You're saying Hi! Hi, how are you?" • Tell peers, "When Cole moves his hand that might mean he's saying "Hi". Let's answer, "Hi, how are you?"
<p>Student communicates for a limited variety of reasons (communicates primarily for wants and needs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model other reasons to communicate (commenting, expressing opinion, greeting, etc.) Refer to the handout "Why We Communicate" for ideas. • Wait expectantly. Allow time for the student to express themselves. • Notice what the student is communicating, and assign meaning to their behaviours. • Give student an active role in activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a joke ready on the student's BIGmack. • "Neela, You're looking at Talia's new backpack. I think you're saying you like it. Nice backpack, Talia!" • "Neela, I see you smiling. I think you're telling me you're happy we're outside. You like being out here." Model "like" on a speech-generating device. • With the student, prepare a question to ask the teacher each day, e.g., "I have a question", "Do you have any jobs for me to do today?"

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