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**TOTAL COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT 2**

**Introduction**

Building a total communication environment means making subtle and simple changes to our communication and environment so that we can improve interaction and understanding.

**Features to Creating a Total Communication Environment**

**Consistency:** Staff must be consistent in the way we communicate with children. It is important to all use the same form of communication when communicating with certain children. Be aware of communication needs and share knowledge

**Visual Systems**: Where possible give the sign (or gesture) as well as the spoken word, this doubles the impact of the message, making it easier to understand. Have photographs/ symbols displayed for different areas and activities. Objects can be used to give individuals an idea of what is about to happen

**Language Level:** Keep language simple and gain the child’s attention by using their name before giving a direction. Break long sentences down into separate ideas and use one key word at a time. Be aware and remember to adjust your language at a level that the listener will understand, slow your speech and give them plenty of time to process the information. Be prepared to wait.

**Language Opportunities:** Provide lots of opportunities to interact and communicate. Know when to use open and closed questions (closed question require a short answer, often “yes” or “no”, open questions seek longer answers). Use social opportunities e.g. snack time to encourage making and communicating choice.

**Encouraging Language:** Encourage language by expanding on what children say. Provide a commentary on play instead of asking lots of questions. Use the child’s interests to create opportunities for communication. Respond positively to any forms of communication- not just speech.

**The Environment:** It is important to create an environment that is conducive to communication. Provide good lighting and reduce background noise or distractions. This is particularly important for those children with hearing or visual impairments.

**Body Language:** Use body language, facial expressions and gesture. They all lend weight and cues to your message.

**Face to Face:** Make sure you are facing the person, be at their level and look at the person you are communicating with. Use touch, it may help individuals understand activities, people and places.