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**TOTAL COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT 1**

**Introduction**

Many children experience difficulties with communication, but there are many key things we can do as communicators to facilitate the process and make communication easier. Building a total communication environment means making subtle and simple changes to our communication and environment so that we can improve interaction and understanding.

**Types of Total Communication**

Here are some examples of communication tools and systems that use a variety of Total Communication approaches. There will be one or more that will suit each individual you support. Make sure you choose methods that give the right level of support and that is motivating for them to use.

**Intensive Interaction** is an approach that can help adults to connect and communicate meaningfully with children with severe and profound learning disabilities. Intensive Interaction focuses on the needs of those who are often described as having ‘no’ language or no effective means of communicating with others. *See advice sheet: Intensive Interaction.*

**Objects of Reference** are objects that are used to communicate a meaning in the same way as words and pictures. An object becomes an Object of Reference when the person begins to associate it with the activity it represents.Objects are concrete and permanent and offer lots of sensory information. Objects of Reference need to be meaningful, motivating and frequently used. *See advice sheet: Objects of reference*

**Sensory References** are similar to Objects of Reference but use sound, sight, smell and taste as a means of orientation rather than a specific object, for example playing the same song to indicate it is tidy up time.

**Voice Output Communication Aids** (VOCA) are pieces of equipment, such as a button that use speech that has been electronically stored. Buttons, switches, head pointers and eye gaze are some of the ways that some users access their devices. VOCAs are powerful tools as they give people a ‘voice’, which is easily understood by all listeners.

**Makaton** is made up of speech, sign, facial expression and symbols. It follows spoken word order and those supporting users would always speak and sign at the same time. Makaton is used by those with varying communication difficulties, including those who have hearing impairment. *See advice sheet: Makaton*

**Symbols** focus on a single concept. PECS uses pictures or symbols of objects. The system slowly trains the person so that they can swap a picture of the thing that they want for the real thing. *See advice sheet: PECS*