Communication Tool Directory – Special Educational Needs (SEND)

This Communication Tool Directory is aimed at ALL partner agencies and ALL levels of practitioners, and should be considered to support understanding of the range of aids / tools that maybe used in communication when working with children with disabilities. This directory aims to help practitioners facilitate conversations with Children with Disabilities / Children with SEN using the communication tools in this directory, which they can then evidence in their recordings. It is important to remember that working with any child is a journey that needs to start with the tools that a child already uses. Practitioners need to adapt their communication style and link with any lead services/ parent /carers who know the communication systems children may use.

Classification (Level of difficulty)	Communication Tool	Description (how it works)	Pre-requirements	What is needed?	Signposting	Training required Yes/No
Basic	Symbol Book	Paper based vocabulary that a user will point to. Typically arranged into a folder and categorised. Can be word, letter or symbol based and content is pre-selected to match the client's skills.	Pre-requirement is to have desired vocabulary choices available to cover all possibilities. Needs prior knowledge of the client's understood vocabulary.	Set of symbol sheets/folder. Can be home-made or proprietary.	School SENCO/ Childs parent/ carer	Yes
Basic	Single message voice output device	Typically a switch type device that when activated speaks aloud a pre-recorded, single message.	Extremely limited due to single message. Can be used with another similar device i.e. one for "yes" and one for "no" if user has capacity to cope with this.	A range of proprietary devices are available.	School SENCO/ Childs parent/ carer	Yes
Basic	Go-Talk (or similar) devices	Battery powered devices that enable multiple cells to be pre-loaded with 'messages' on paper overlays that slide into the device. Pressing on a cell invokes that message to be spoken out. Overlays can use word or symbol (or both).	Offer a range of vocabulary that is limited only by the capacity of device chosen.	Cost of device.	School SENCO/ Childs parent/ carer	Yes
Basic	Sign Along	Key word signing system based on BSL. Offers a range of limited needs and interest based vocabulary - Use alongside speech	Sign language programme for adults and children with learning or communication difficulties. Makaton is used for teaching communication, language and literacy skills with children and adults who are at an early stage of communication and language development.	Printed instructions / sign graphics	Specialist education lead for the child	Yes
Basic	Makaton	Signs from BSL and Speech Used alongside speech in spoken word order. Offers a range of limited needs and interest based	Sign language programme for adults and children with learning or communication difficulties. Makaton is used for teaching communication, language and literacy skills	Printed instructions / sign graphics	Specialist education lead for the child	Yes

		vocabulary based around everyday nouns and verbs.	with children and adults who are at an early stage of communication and language development.			
Basic/Medium	Digital Voice Recorder	Capture the voice directly into a digital voice recorder and play back as required or download to convert to digital file or printed format.	Suitable speech clarity. Optional facilitation of transcription.	Recording device. Optional addition of transcription software.	School SENCO/ Childs parent/ carer	No
Medium	eTrans frame	A clear Perspex screen positioned between two people sitting face to face. Symbols (or words) are placed on the screen and the user indicates their 'message' by looking at their chosen target.	Relies on the communication partner being able to clearly 'read' the client's eye based indications.	Frame and pre-creation of a range of vocabulary in word, letter or symbol form.	Specialist education lead for the child	Yes
Complex	Hands on Body sign	Adapt/deliver signing into a tactile form – e.g. Makaton, or BSL. Mainly used alongside speech. Deafblind could be signing BSL hand under hand. Can incorporate Finger spelling.	A language designed for young people with multiple disabilities and visual impairment. An aid to the understanding of functional words and routines. Provides support for the individual to express their needs.	Cost of instruction from experienced tutor. Printed instructions / sign graphics.	Specialist education lead for the child SENSE – national charity	Yes
Complex	Voice Recognition Software	Turn your voice into text: Speak into a microphone connected to a computer loaded with VRS software and the text is typed into a word processor.	Requires consistent voice and a controlled environment.	Software licence. Computer hardware including a microphone.	School SENCO Specialist education lead for the child	Yes
Complex	Eye Gaze	Computer control system that replaces the mouse and keyboard. Cursor movement and selection are achieved through tracking eye movement.	Is highly challenging and skills need to be built up over time. Technically complex. Should be seen as a means of control of software programs.	High cost hardware and software. Ongoing software development is required to achieve optimum use.	Specialist education lead for the child	Yes
Complex	Voice output communication aids	Devices that generate a voice. Vocabulary sets are developed in line with the user's capabilities and these include feature rich possibilities such as dynamic navigation of vocabulary pages, word or phrase prediction	Devices are typically deployed to a user and developed (personalised) to suite their level of communication. Pre-loaded vocabulary packages range from simple child – friendly ones through to highly complex interfaces. Training in use of device and programming are prerequisites.	High cost software and hardware. Dependency on background support to develop user's vocabulary pages.	Specialist education lead for the child	Yes
Complex	BSL	Sign Language system.	Principally used by people	Cost of training course	Specialist	Yes

		Language in its own Right. Has regional variations Unique grammar Different word order No or little speech Use of finger spelling	with a significant hearing loss some of whom may not develop fluent spoken language skills.	and exam. Printed instructions / sign graphics	education lead for the child Calderdale Adult Learning	
Complex	Signed supported English (SSE)	Based on BSL sign system. Not A language in its own right. Follows same word order as spoken English. Can be used alongside speech.	Principally used by people with a significant hearing loss who may need sign to support the development of spoken language/ literacy skills	Cost of instruction from experienced tutor. Printed instructions / sign graphics	Specialist education lead for the child	yes
Complex	PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)	Enables young people to communicate through picture exchange and teaches them to approach an adult for their request	Only suitable for young people who are able to learn to communicate through exchange.	Training MUST be given before following this approach. PECS Book Pictures/ visual photos Any additional package required for the individual.	Email address is https://Pecs-unitedkingdom.com 01273 609555	yes - PECS training available through Pyramid Educational Consultants

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