

Communications Toolkit Guidance Notes

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Introduction

The communications toolkit is a compilation of sample worksheets and communications boards created by the Information, Advice and Support Services Network, or taken from existing resources available to the public online.

The tools are available for services to download and save them electronically, edit them and print as needed. They are intentionally aesthetically plain, so that individual services can add branding or specific detail, unique to locality or service.

The tools have been loosely grouped in these guidance notes to reflect the order you might use them in; starting with introductions, arranging practicalities for working together, and building rapport. The next group of tools may be beneficial for establishing the wishes and feelings of some children and young people. The final set of tools may be particularly beneficial to children and young people on the autistic spectrum, but will also work with other children and young people. Not all of the tools will be suitable for all children and young people, but they are intended to get you started with thinking creatively about how to engage.

If possible, some of the tools can be printed on coloured paper or card to make them more aesthetically pleasing and child-friendly. It can also be useful to laminate pointing boards and use them with wipe-clean whiteboard markers to draw or write on them and re-use.

Keep copies of anything children or young person produce in sessions, until you have finished working with them. Laminated boards can be photocopied for your records before being wiped clean.

If you have any feedback or questions about any of the materials included in this toolkit, please contact the Information, Advice and Support Services Network on IASSN@ncb.org.uk.

Guidance notes

1. Introductions – practicalities for working together

This form can be completed with a child or young person before any face-to-face work is undertaken. It can be used face-to-face, as a guide for staff to work through over the phone, sent out directly to the child or young person, or sent to parents/carers to ask them to complete with the child or young person, depending on their ability.

It might be useful to explain to the child or young person that you want them to have their say about how you work together, and you will do your best to accommodate this, but sometimes you might not be able to do everything on the list.

If you are completing this with a child or young person face-to-face, then you could give them the option of writing or drawing their answers, they could point to preferred options, or they could respond verbally and you could complete it on their behalf. As one of your first contacts with the child or young person, this brief exercise should give them the message from the outset that they are valued as equal stakeholders, what they think matters and that you are willing to listen to their views and take them seriously.

2. Getting to know you activity sheet

This is an activities sheet of playful questions which can be completed on your first session with a child or young person. I have found this useful in the past for building rapport and breaking the ice.

If you have limited time and they are able to do so, then you could send it out in advance and ask them to complete it and bring along to your session. I would normally print this on coloured paper and ask the child or young person to draw their answers using coloured pens. You could also complete it on their behalf, if they want to talk through their answers with you instead.

3. Record of our meetings

This is a basic information record that can work in the form of a social story. This tool is beneficial for use with children or young people who may struggle to concentrate or retain information. It can be helpful in reducing anxiety about meetings and ensuring the child or young person fully understands the process and what is happening. It can also be useful to reduce confusion for children or young people who work with a lot of different services and attend many different meetings, which can be easy to lose track of.

The first two pages should be completed at the end of the first meeting and the child or young person should take a copy away with them. Further information should be completed at the end of each session.

I would suggest that you do not give the child or young person the only copy of their record, but photocopy it for them, or email it to them if they use email.

Lots of children and young people will benefit from this being completed using symbols and photographs – for example a photograph of the worker next to their name, a photograph of the place that the meeting takes place etc. Obviously, this takes a lot more time, but those things can be completed once, saved electronically and included on the forms as standard for future work.

4. What I like about myself / what you admire

5. What's important to me

These worksheets were downloaded for free from:
www.personalisingeducation.org .

They may be useful for supporting children and young people to express the things that matter to them and what their strengths are. The worksheets could be sent out and completed in advance of your meetings, or used in sessions with drawings, symbols or cutting and sticking.

The 'what you admire' worksheet is intended to be given to someone who knows the child or young person well. This could be a parent, sibling, friend or teacher. It may be useful to send this out in advance and then go through the answers with the child or young person to explore how the ideas might translate to more concrete outcomes and aspirations for the child or young person.

6. Yellow brick road - Aspirations

This is a very flexible activity to promote planning, aspirations and solution-focused thinking in children and young people. It can be used to help children and young people think through their aspirations and outcomes, or it can be used for more specific conversations around overcoming barriers.

This basic illustration should be used as a guide. If you are short of time, then I would suggest this could be printed or photocopied (A3, if possible) and laminated to be used with wipe-clean whiteboard markers. Alternatively, you could use post-its to fill in the information, and move these around on the illustration as the conversation progresses.

If you have time, then it would be more engaging for lots of children and young people to draw the road out for themselves on large (flipchart) paper or build a road with play doh or lego bricks – whatever is available.

The basic idea is that you are moving the child or young person on from thinking about where they are at the moment, to where they want to be in future. The place in the future (represented by the magical land of Oz, in this case) should be explored, by making suggestions or asking questions about the detail of the future 'dream'. You would then explore details about the journey. You could include questions such as:

Who will go with you to support you on the journey? They can draw the people that they need or want to be with them. They might want to give the people different jobs.

Is there anything getting in the way? You could represent this by drawing a river as a barrier and then looking at how we can build bridges to cross those barriers.

Is there anything we need to take with us? Can we pack a kit bag of things we might need on the journey? This could include specialist equipment or provision that they need to support them. You could also ask if there is anything missing from their kit bag that is making the journey harder.

This tool is flexible and it can take a lot or a little time and energy, depending on what you have available. It can be useful for starting a dialogue and breaking down big decisions and ideas into more playful, manageable conversations through story telling. The final picture does not have to be concrete, but might be a good starting point for developing clearer plans. Some children and young people also find it easier to talk about a character than answer direct questions about themselves, e.g.: 'What might Sarah need in her kit bag?', rather than: 'What do you need to support you?'

7. Relationships Map

This is also a basic sample that can be adapted or drawn out by the child or young person themselves. The child or young person can write the names of people that are important to them, draw them, use symbols or cut and stick photographs onto the circles.

The tool can be used to support children and young people to think through who the key people are in their lives. It can be useful for starting conversations around who the child or young person wants to continue to be part of their lives in the future and what their roles should be.

8. Pointing boards

Pointing boards can be printed onto card and/or laminated to be reused with children and young people that communicate using symbols. Some children and young people may point with their finger to express what they want. The boards can also be used for eye pointing to preferences. The worker can use the boards to point to the topic they are talking about, but, as with Makaton signing, you should always use spoken words at the same time.

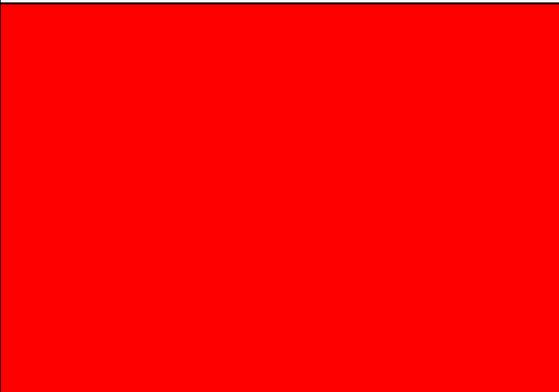
If you have time, then you can cut out symbols and they can be arranged to build sentences. I have selected a sample of symbols that may be useful for getting started, but there are many more available for free online.

www.adelaideautismadventures.org/printables.html has a particularly good selection.

9. What is working and not working

This is an example of a **talking map**, which can be used along with the symbols. Talking maps can be useful for children and young people who communicate through visual tools, as well as more generally for children and young people that need support in breaking down decision making to easy steps.

You can create other talking maps very easily by dividing a page into two binary options and allowing the child or young person to point to their preferred option. The two binary options could be yes/no or like/dislike. You can work through the symbols and ask the child or young person to place symbols where they prefer on the talking map. See a further example below:

YES	NO
	

10. Red, green and question cards

These are very simple cards that can be used flexibly to support a child or young person to have a voice in a face to face meeting. I would explain at the start of the meeting how the cards can be used

and encourage the child or young person to use them at intervals throughout the meeting to express agreement, disagreement or uncertainty. The child or young person can hold the card up or point to it with their finger or their eyes. They can also be useful in three way meetings to use with children, young people and parents as a way of managing interruptions when someone else is speaking.

11. Timetable

Timetables may be particularly useful for children and young people on the autistic spectrum to reduce anxiety about unfamiliar processes, help to compartmentalise topics and pace sessions to keep the child or young person focused. This is a basic sample that can be adapted or used to explain what children and young people can expect to happen and when.

I would complete this in advance and send it out before the meeting, or complete it with the child or young person at the start of the meeting. You can use symbols, stickers, photographs or coloured pens to complete this. The timetable should include the date, day of the week and the time. It can be broken down into subjects to be discussed in one meeting, or it can map out session plans for several meetings in advance. I would cross each step out as the session progresses to illustrate where you are up to at any given point.

12. First / Then board

These boards can also be printed onto card or laminated for re-use. They are normally used with children and young people on the autistic spectrum and serve a similar function to timetables. To keep a child or young person on task, you could place a symbol or draw or write on post-its and place them in the sections to indicate what you will do first, and what will happen afterwards. These can be altered and moved around as the session progresses, and can be a useful tool for keeping children on task and managing anxiety or distractions.

13. Feedback form

If the child or young person is able, then I would ask them to complete a feedback form independently at the end of each session.

They could use coloured pens or stickers to mark their ratings on the form. Alternatively, the parent or carer could be asked to work through the form with the child or young person, or the worker could do it with them at the end of the session.

I would explain to the child or young person the purpose of the form and how you will use the information, so that they are not concerned about getting into trouble and they know it is not a test.

Suggested Shopping List

It is worth investing in a few cheap, practical resources that can be brought out to support sessions with children and young people. These are not essential to have, but can be surprisingly effective for engaging children and young people.

- Building bricks (lego or similar, for keeping hands busy)
- Play doh (as above)
- Safety scissors and glue stick
- Free catalogues / magazines for cutting and sticking
- Felt tips / crayons
- Basic stickers (coloured dots, stars or smiley faces)
- Coloured paper / card
- Coloured post-its

If your service has the budget to invest in more comprehensive communication aids, then you could also look at:

- The 'I'll Go First Toolkit' available from the Children's Society website
- Boardmaker computer software for writing with symbols

- Basic Makaton staff training