

Low tech communication strategies

Alphabet boards

An alphabet board is a low tech way of communicating. Even if you have a high tech aid using an alphabet board to communicate can be a useful strategy if you are ever without your communication aid.

An alphabet board can be used in different ways. If the client is able they can spell out their message. If they find pointing difficult they might need a smaller alphabet so that they can make smaller pointing movements or they could try a stylus or pen.

If the client is no longer able to point at all an alphabet chart can be used with partner assisted scanning. The partner will read down the rows asking “is the letter you want on this row”. When the client indicated that their partner has reached the right row the partner will then move along that row until the client indicates that they have reached the right letter. The partner can either read out the letter until the client indicates for move their finger along the letters.

A	B	C	D		
E	F	G	H		
I	J	K	L	M	N
O	P	Q	R	S	T
U	V	W	X	Y	Z

Alphabet boards can be made up to meet the needs of the client. Quick messages can also be added, especially if the client is still able to point to the letters themselves.

Things to consider

- The communication partner might find it easier to write down the letters as the client points to them/indicates them. If the message is long this can mean having to remember lots of letters and it is easy to get the message wrong and become frustrated.
- The client needs to be aware of whether their communication partner has understood them or not. One important strategy is for the client to indicate when they have come to the end of the word. When pointing this can be done by pointing off the chart or having an “end of word” square. It can be helpful for the partner to then say what they have recorded that word as so any miscommunications can be resolved.

A	B	C	D	Yes		New word
E	F	G	H	No		That is wrong
I	J	K	L	M	N	Start again
O	P	Q	R	S	T	I need the bathroom
U	V	W	X	Y	Z	I am uncomfortable

For clients with visual problems they might prefer a high contrast layout.

A	B	C	D		
E	F	G	H		
I	J	K	L	M	N
O	P	Q	R	S	T
U	V	W	X	Y	Z

A	B	C	D	Yes	New word	
E	F	G	H	No	That is wrong	
I	J	K	L	M	N	Start again
O	P	Q	R	S	T	I need the bathroom
U	V	W	X	Y	Z	I am uncomfortable

Numbers can also be added

A	B	C	D	Yes		New word			
E	F	G	H	No		That is wrong			
I	J	K	L	M	N	Start again			
O	P	Q	R	S	T	I need the bathroom			
U	V	W	X	Y	Z	I am uncomfortable			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

E-Tran frame

An E-Tran frame is a piece of low tech equipment that can be used by the client, with a partner, to communicate if the client is able to point with their eyes. Even if you have a high tech aid using an E-tran frame to communicate can be a useful strategy if you are ever without your communication aid.

An E-Tran frame is made of a piece of clear Perspex onto which symbols or words can be stuck with Blu-Tack or Velcro to each side of the frame. The communication partner holds the E-Tran frame between themselves and the client. The client can spell out words by looking at the block of letters that contains the letter that they want to spell and then the dot that is in the same colour as the ink in which the letter they want is written.

E.g. To indicate the letter L the client would first look at the block of letters containing G-L and would then look at the red dot.



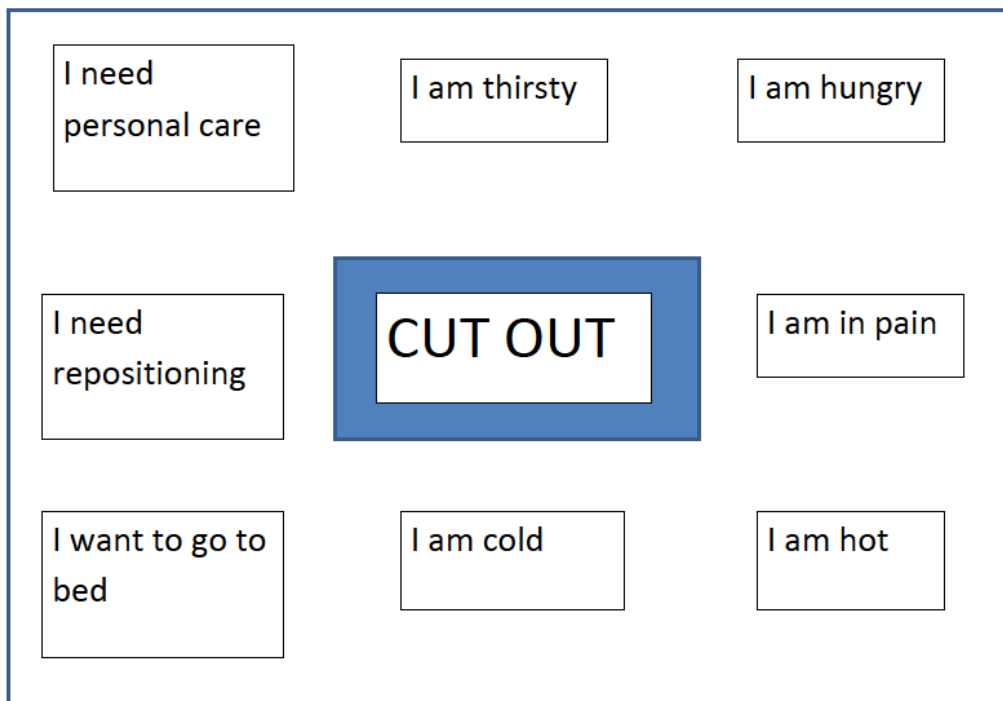
To indicate the end of a word the client can look through the whole in the middle of the frame at their communication partner.

Things to consider.

- It is sometimes beneficial for the communication partner to prompt the client by saying “which block?” and “which colour” so that both are clear what the client is trying to indicate.

- The communication partner might find it easier to write down the letters as the client points to them/indicates them. If the message is long this can mean having to remember lots of letters and it is easy to get the message wrong and become frustrated.

Messages can also be stuck on the E-Tran frame instead of letters and coloured dots.



Free Etran resources can be found at

<http://www.speakbook.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/speakbook-4th-ed.pdf>

<http://www.speakbook.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Printing-Instructions1.pdf>



There is a light tech version of the E-Tran frame called a Megabee. This works in a similar method.

As with the E-Tran frame the communication partner holds it between themselves and the client. Below is shown the side that the communication partner sees. As before the client will indicate which block contains the letter that they want. With the Megabee instead of the communication partner having to remember which colour the client indicated they will press the button of that colour at the bottom of the screen. Again when

the client indicates the dot that is in the same colour as the ink in which the letter they want is written the communication partner will press the button of that colour.

The benefit of the Megabee is that the communication partner does not need to remember or write down which letters the client spelled out as the message is displayed on the grey message bar at the bottom of the device.

As with the E-Tran frame it is beneficial if the communication partner prompts the client by saying “which block?” and “which colour” so that both are clear what the client is trying to indicate.

Low Tech Partner Assisted Scanning

In situations where the client is not in a position to be able to use a high tech device to speak their needs it is important to have an agreed system of 'low tech' AAC support to facilitate their basic requirements.

In situations where the client cannot point to a communication book or a list of options, a system of 'Partner Assisted Scanning' can be used to help them quickly communicate regularly used phrases.

For example:

Topic: In Bed

List of phrases:

I need to turn over

I want to get up

I need the toilet

I'm too hot

I'm too cold

I don't feel well

I feel sick

I am uncomfortable

I need to tell you something else

Auditory cue:

Turn over

Get up

Need toilet

Too hot

Too cold

Not well

Feel sick

Uncomfortable

Something else

Topic: Regular everyday phrases

List of phrases:

Can I have a cup of tea?

I need the toilet

Take my jumper off

Put my jumper on

Move my chair

Auditory cue:

Cup of tea

Need toilet

Jumper off

Jumper on

Move chair

The client will have agreed the content of each list and know what options are recorded on each page. Once the conversation partner has identified which topic list is required they will read down the 'auditory cue' list, one line at a time, until the client has signalled 'yes' to the target sentence.

For example, the client chooses the 'Regular everyday phrases' list and the communication partner then reads down the auditory cue list: *Cup of tea, Need toilet, Jumper off, ...* until the client signals 'yes'. Then the conversation partner will read the full sentence: **'Take my jumper off'** to confirm that the message has been understood.

Eye link

EyeLink, is a transparent board on which letters, numbers and words are displayed.

The board is held vertically

by the communication partner between him or herself and the client with the letters facing the client.

The client then points his or her eye gaze at the desired letter or number while the communication partner looks through the board at the client's eyes. The gaze of the client remains fixed on the item while the

communication partner moves the board in an attempt to "link" eyes with the client, at which point they will both be looking at the desired letter or the word *space*.

A	B	C	D	Back space	space
E	F	G	H	Numbers	Start over
I 0	J 1	K 2	L 3	M 4	N 5
O 6	P 7	Q 8	R 9	S 10	T (100)
U 11	V 12	W :00	X :15	Y :30	Z :45

YES

NO

Writing

One strategy is for the client themselves, if they can still write, to use a white board to convey keywords. A smaller whiteboard can be used if you want it to be portable.

Alternatively a communication partner can write down options of the whiteboard and the client can point with their finger or eyepoint towards the answer that they want. Eg you could write tea and coffee on the board for the client to point to.

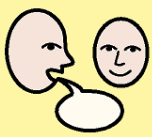
Communication book

This can be made up with symbols of words and can be used with direct access (the client points to the words/symbols themselves), with partner assisted scanning or with eye pointing.

Words/symbols can be arranged by topic such as breakfast, activities and feelings.

<http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk/page/communication-books>


<http://acecentre.org.uk/developing-and-using-a-communication-book1>



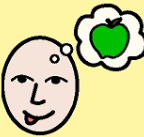
I want to say something




I am cold




I am hot



I am hungry



I am thirsty




I need my glasses



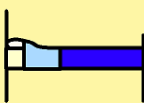
I am uncomfortable



I need the toilet



I need my AAC book



I want to go to bed




please put on the tv




It's too loud



It's too quiet



please change channel



please turn off the tv

Hospital Communication Passport

These are very useful if the client need to be admitted to hospital. They include all sorts of useful information about the client to make their stay as comfortable as it can be. Templates are available on the internet and although they are designed for people with Learning Disabilities they contain sections that are relevant for people with communication difficulties. The statement that the client has a learning disability can be deleted from the document.

A communication passport details how health care professionals can communicate with the client most effectively and how the health care professional can be a supportive communication partner. They also detail other important information about the client including their support needs, medication, eating and drinking. They also include who supports the client outside of hospital, both professional and friends and family.

By making this information available a communication passport presents the client as a person rather than just a medical condition.

A communication passport needs to be updated regularly to ensure that it is still relevant to the client.

An example of a hospital communication passport is listed below:

<http://www.easyhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/null/Hospital%20Passport%20Template%20-%20Editable.doc>

http://www.easyhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/traffic_light_assessment_form.pdf

Communication cards

These are small cards, of about credit card size, that contain phrases or words for a particular situation, such as visiting a coffee shop or asking for a train ticket. As they are smaller they are more portable.

I have a condition that affects my ability to speak

I can understand what you say

Please ask me yes / no questions

I will use my communication cards to tell you what I want

iPads

A link to different Apps for iPads can be found at:

<http://www.callscotland.org.uk/downloads/posters-and-leaflets/>

Training run by Chailey Communication Aid Service

We are developing our training and will post details of training courses and how to access them on our website in due course.

On line training

Call Scotland have developed two series of modules about AAC; Introduction to AAC and AAC in Education. These modules introduce the types of clients who might have communication difficulties, strategies that can be used to assist communication, AAC and how to assist someone with AAC.

<http://www.aacscotland.org.uk/Online-Learning-Modules/>

Many of the suppliers also have online training about their products.