

Practice Tool 5

Communication Tools

The aim of this document is to support you with communication for a person you are working with, in terms of the safeguarding information and advice and plans that they receive.

This guidance document is provided to help staff working with people who may have communication needs. We know in general what works for service users in terms of safeguarding. In addition this document looks at specific tools that aid this process when working with people who have communication needs.

The majority of Irish services promote and advocate for the use of Total and Inclusive Communication approaches to enable successful and meaningful communication between people.

Using this approach means acknowledging that supporting communication is everyone's responsibility, and to use all means of communication available to a person for e.g. verbal communication/ speech, use of sounds, use of body language and facial expression, sign systems and gesture, photographs, symbols, objects, written words and high tech augmentative and alternative communication devices. It is important to ensure that the environment around the person lends itself to good communication, e.g. removing as much background noise as possible.

What is available?

Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) support is varied across Irish services and not every service has regular access to SLT.

It is always advisable to refer to, or consult with SLT for people who have communication needs, but in the absence of this service many practitioners can and do use approaches and tools that aid communication.

The following are examples of Total and Inclusive Communication approaches, please note this is not an exhaustive list.

Approaches / Tools	
Information on a person's current communication preferences	<p>All About Me books, also known as Personal Communication passports (CALL Scotland)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An All About Me Book or Passport gives a person a way to share key information about themselves, to help people to get to know them. A Passport is owned and shared by the person and other people in their life. It is especially important when going to new places and meeting new people. <p>Personal Communication Dictionaries (Scope (Vic.) Ltd. 2004)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a template that can be used to record an individual's gestures, body language, facial expression, vocalisations, and signs. It also records what these movements or sounds may mean and gives suggestions for how the listener/communication partner should respond. Your service may have other personal communication profiles or documentation around a person's will and preference about their life decisions. <p>DisDat (Northumberland Tyne & Wear NHS Trust and St. Oswald's Hospice, 2008)</p>
Checklists	<p>This is a checklist which is intended to help identify distress cues in people who have different communication abilities.</p> <p>Designed to also document a person's usual content cues, which allows distress cues to be identified more clearly. A monitoring tool allows those who support the person to identify when distress is happening.</p> <p>The DisDat may be a supportive tool for Safeguarding screening/ investigations and to establish whether Safeguarding Plans are impacting on a person's level of distress/ content.</p>
Sign Systems	<p>Lámh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lámh is a manual sign system used by children and adults with intellectual disability and communication needs in Ireland. With Lámh, speech is always used with signs and key words in a sentence are signed. Lámh currently has 588 signs. Irish Sign Language (ISL)

Approaches / Tools

<p>General Visual and Picture supports and low Tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)</p>	<p>Photos/ symbols of vocabulary related to safeguarding and emotions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people benefit from the use of images alongside the spoken word when discussing safeguarding issues. They can be also used when asking a person to rate their feelings of safety, happiness etc. • Depending on the person's preference and understanding, these can be photographs, coloured images, black and white images. • There are some packages available which contain relevant images for e.g. Photosymbols Ltd. <p>Quick access Communication Displays with core words for safeguarding/ emotions for e.g. Communication card on a lanyard/ keyring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the display is to provide a method of communication for people who may require support to communicate effectively. This can help both the person and their communication partner.
<p>Visually Supported Conversations</p>	<p>Talking Mats (Cameron, L. and Murphy, J. 1998)</p> <p>A Talking Mat is a visual communication framework which supports people with communication difficulties to express their feelings and views. Talking Mats can be carried out physically or in a digital space, for example a tablet, laptop or computer. (https://www.talkingmats.com/)</p> <p>There is also a specific Resource. The Keeping Safe Talking Mats. It provides: A listening space for people to raise concerns, a structure for staff to find out what people are thinking about their lives, and raise issues that can be difficult to discuss. https://www.talkingmats.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/20170424-Keeping-Safe-Final-report.pdfreport.pdf (talkingmats.com)</p>
<p>High Tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices</p>	<p>Voice Output Communication Devices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person may have an electronic communication device which is typically recommended by their SLT. These can range in size and function for e.g. single messages to complex conversations. Training and support on how to ensure the device is used during conversations may be required.

Approaches / Tools

Accessible Communication and Information

Accessible Communication and Information

To accommodate all forms of communication and levels of understanding you will need to adjust the environment, your language and communication style and documentation to suit the person.

Other Accessible Information supports can be used for e.g.

- Easy Read information: these are made up of short, simple sentences that will communicate the most important messages you need to get across. They are usually accompanied by photos/ pictures that will aid understanding. (Make it Easy, 2011)
- (Books) **Beyond words**. These are word-free picture stories that help people understand and communicate their feelings, learn about new experiences and tell their own stories. <https://booksbeyondwords.co.uk/>
- Audio/ Internet and Websites
- Large print, Braille, audio descriptions
- Video/ Multi-media information with closed captioning for e.g. safeguarding videos developed by Brothers of Charity Services, Stewarts "Lionel the Lion" and the HSE Elder Abuse Videos.

References:

CALL Scotland <https://www.callscotland.org.uk>

Cameron, L. and Murphy, J. The effectiveness of Talking Mats® with people with intellectual disability. British Journal of Learning Disabilities. Dec 2008, Vol. 36 Issue 4, p232-241. 10p.
3 Black and White Photographs, 1 Diagram, 2 Charts, 8 Graphs.

Liverpool John Moores University. Safeguarding Policy 2023. Make it Easy, 2011

Northumberland Tyne & Wear NHS Trust and St. Oswald's Hospice, 2008 Disdat. www.disdat.co.uk

Nosowska G (2013). Providing good information and advice: Practice Tool. Dartington: Research in Practice for Adults

Romeo, L (2016) Annual Report by the Chief Social Worker for Adults 2015-2016. London: Department of Health.

(Scope (Vic.) Ltd. 2004) <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/about-us>