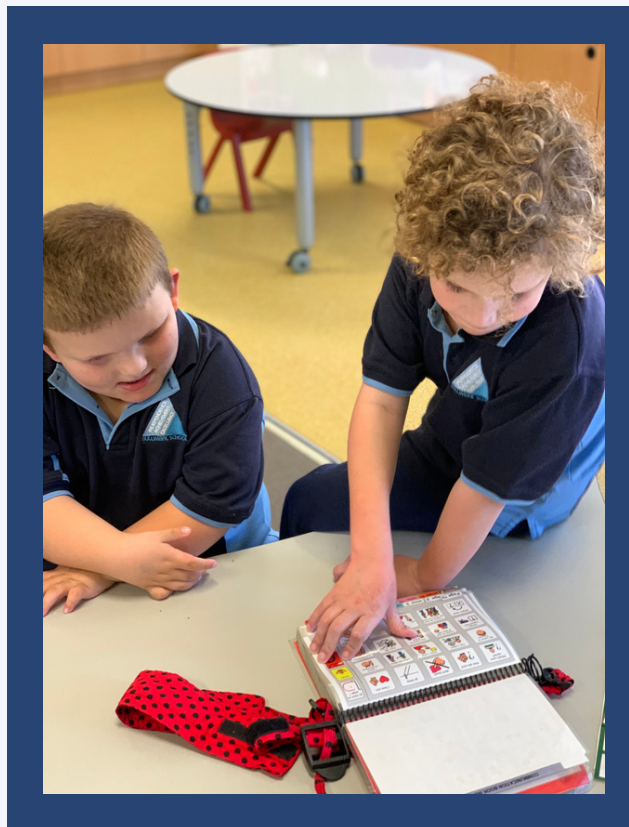




Communication Policy



Draft, March 2023

Bullimbal School

Communication Policy Draft

This policy outlines Bullimbal School's beliefs, systems and processes to support every student to build their communicative competence and move towards being an autonomous communicator.

Bullimbal School is committed to being a communication accessible school. We recognise that communication is a human right (United Nations, 1948) and we align ourselves with the Communication Bill of Rights (Brady et al, 2016).

Communication Bill of Rights

To participate fully in communication interactions, each person has these fundamental communication rights:

1. The right to interact socially, maintain social closeness, and build relationships
2. The right to request desired objects, actions, events, and people
3. The right to refuse or reject undesired objects, actions, events, or choices
4. The right to express personal preferences and feelings
5. The right to make choices from meaningful alternatives
6. The right to make comments and share opinions
7. The right to ask for and give information, including information about changes in routine and environment
8. The right to be informed about people and events in one's life
9. The right to access interventions and supports that improve communication
10. The right to have communication acts acknowledged and responded to even when the desired outcome cannot be realized
11. The right to have access to functioning AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) and other AT (assistive technology) services and devices at all times
12. The right to access environmental contexts, interactions, and opportunities that promote participation as full communication partners with other people, including peers
13. The right to be treated with dignity and addressed with respect and courtesy
14. The right to be addressed directly and not be spoken for or talked about in the third person while present
15. The right to have clear, meaningful, and culturally and linguistically appropriate communications

A simplified version of the Communication Bill of Rights is provided in Appendix A.

Communication

Everyone needs to be able to communicate, in every situation. Beginning, or emergent, communicators use informal means, such as body language, facial expression and behaviour. Over time, they develop more formal means of communicating - which include socially appropriate gestures, body language, facial expression and language. They learn to become formal communicators through being in a language rich environment, and having repeated interactions with proficient communicators.

We also recognise that we are all multimodal communicators - every day we use a range of modes to communicate, including gestures, body language, facial expression and language. We believe that each of these modes is equally important.

The majority of the students at Bullimbal School have Complex Communication Needs (CCN). This means that they need to use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) as one of their modes for communicating with others.

"Communication is connection and expression, every day and everywhere"

AAC Best Practise

Speech Pathology Australia (2020) states that an understanding of the Participation Model of AAC (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013) is "part of the optimal process for assessment, intervention and monitoring outcomes" when implementing AAC with people with complex communication needs. The Participation Model includes principles for identifying how various AAC systems and options can address current and future needs of people with complex communication needs, with a focus on supporting their participation within their chosen communities. It also recognises that every individual has a "communication system for today" and that we need to identify and put steps in place to help each individual move to a "system for tomorrow".

The Participation Model is part of a dynamic assessment, intervention and monitoring cycle. Speech Pathology Australia (2020) recommends that this cycle occurs within the person's own environments. Bullimbal School recognises that we are a significant environment in each student's life and, therefore, that we need to work with each student's speech pathologist as part of that assessment, intervention and monitoring cycle.

To support this cycle, all staff at Bullimbal receive professional development in best practise AAC, and participate in processes to review and refresh their skills in being a good communication partner.

For students who are learning to use AAC, we understand that their communication system needs to be modelled and explicitly taught in meaningful, purposeful ways embedded throughout each student's school and family life. Developing communicative competence (Light & McNaughton, 2014) enables them to have control and influence over their environment. Importantly, for the school community, it enables our students to have a voice and provides access to all curriculum areas.

Identify participation patterns and communication needs

Identify participation barriers

Assess opportunity barriers

Assess access barriers

- Policy
- Practice
- Facilitator skill
- Facilitator knowledge
- Attitude

Assess current communication

Assess potential to increase natural ability

Assess potential for environmental adaptations

Assess potential to utilize AAC systems and/or devices

Operational requirements profile

Constraints Profile

Capability Profile

Motor

Cognitive/linguistic

Literacy

Sensory/perceptual

Opportunity interventions

Natural ability interventions

Environmental adaptation interventions

AAC system /device interventions

Plan and Implement Interventions for today and tomorrow

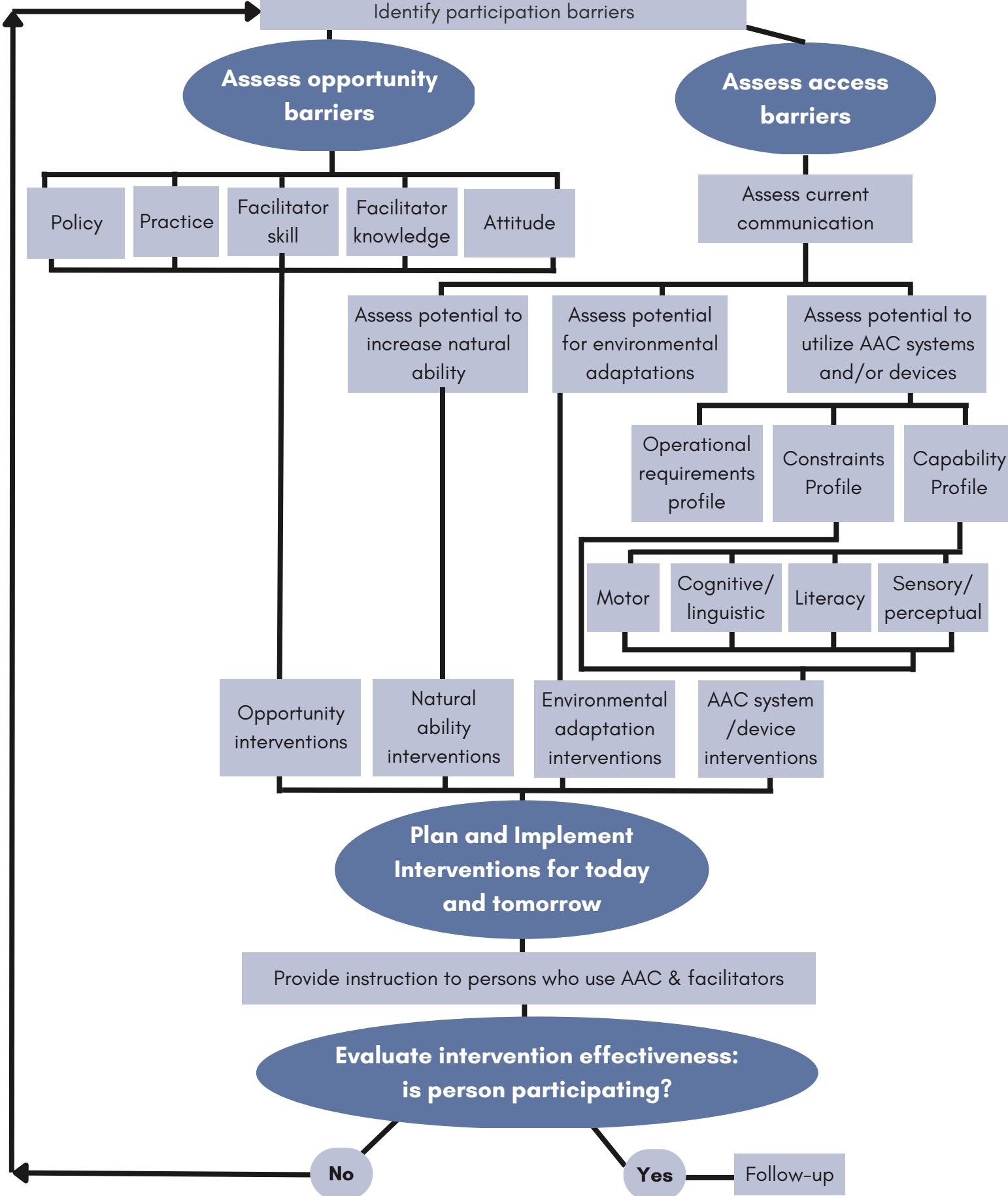
Provide instruction to persons who use AAC & facilitators

Evaluate intervention effectiveness: is person participating?

No

Yes

Follow-up



Communicative Competence

Communicative competence is the ability to communicate in a socially appropriate manner. AAC intervention aims to build communicative competence for each individual.

Communicative competence is essential to the quality of life of individuals with complex communication needs, for it provides the means to attain personal, educational, vocational, and social goals (Calculator, 2009; Lund & Light, 2007).

Communicative competence is composed of four interrelated domains (Light & McNaughton, 2014).

Linguistic Competence

Each individual who is learning to use AAC needs to develop an understanding of the meaning of symbols in their system, and then an understanding of how to combine them to produce language,

Operational Competence

Each individual needs to develop operational skills for both electronic and non-electronic AAC systems. These include the techniques to operate the system e.g forming a finger point, and the skills to navigate and operate the system.

Social Competence

Each individual needs to learn the pragmatic aspects of communication e.g. initiation, taking turns, maintaining topics, to express a wide range of communicative functions e.g. refusing, obtaining, greeting, sharing. Social competence also includes skills such as participating actively in interactions, demonstrating an interest in their communication partners.

Strategic Competence

Individuals who use AAC frequently encounter situations where they need to use strategies to supplement and support the use of their AAC system. These might be linguistic strategies e.g. describing a word they want to use that isn't in their AAC system, operational strategies e.g. using telegraphic speech to enhance their speed of communication, and social strategies e.g. using an introduction strategy to explain their AAC system.

Do's and Don'ts of AAC

Bullimbal School aligns our AAC Implementation with the Do's and Don'ts of AAC (Farrall & Niemeijer, 2015).

This is what we do		This is what we don't do	
	Do use the AAC system to talk yourself		Don't expect the AAC user to communicate without you modelling how
	Do aim high		Don't demand prerequisite skills
	Do use a well designed, comprehensive vocabulary e.g. core vocabulary or PODD		Don't provide an AAC system with only a handful of choices
	Do provide enough wait time		Don't do all the talking
	Do ask open ended questions		Don't ask questions the AAC user knows you already know the answer to
	Do focus on key words when modelling		Don't think you need to always model grammatically correct sentences
	Do respect multi-modal communication		Don't say "And now say it on your talker"
	Do allow exploration and access to the whole vocabulary		Don't create custom pages for specific activities
	Do make sure AAC is available all day, every day		Don't limit access to the AAC system
	Do describe what you want to say using core words		Don't focus on adding lots of vocabulary

AAC Systems

"Selection of AAC technology must be made with a basic premise of AAC in mind: that is, that no one mode of communication has universal usefulness across all people with complex communication needs, and no one technology will meet all of an individual's communication needs" (Speech Pathology Australia, 2020).

AAC systems can be both non-electronic and electronic, and Bullimbal recognises that each student using AAC should have access to both. Non-electronic robust AAC systems have many advantages. They do not need charging, can go in a wide range of environments (eg. the sandpit, swimming pool and out in the sunshine). Electronic communication devices with a robust language system have the advantage of producing voice output. Additional vocabulary can be added without adding weight. An electronic system can also be used as a writing tool, giving students with complex needs an opportunity to write independently.

PODD at Bullimbal

Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display communication books (PODD) are our core communication tool across all curriculum areas and school places. This means that all staff at Bullimbal receive training in PODD, and model use of PODD throughout the day.

Bullimbal has selected PODD as our core communication tool because:

- It is the only robust AAC system that spans from early language to complex language in both electronic and non-electronic systems
- It is the only robust AAC system commercially available in a range of access methodologies
- It is the only robust AAC system commercially available in a range of visual presentations

This means that there is a version of PODD suitable for each student's access and language development needs.

Additionally, PODD is was developed using principles of best practise in AAC design. It has now been in use for over 25 years and has been used by 100s of individuals and their support people. Features include:

- The routine placement and availability of vocabulary, which assists to develop automaticity of motor planning, language learning and initiation.
- Vocabulary is organised in English word order, left to right across each page

Pragmatic branch starters are unique to PODD. They support emergent communicators to be more successful and serve two purposes.

- They provide faster predictive links to pages of vocabulary commonly required to express a particular communication function.
- They compensate for the reduced use of environmental supports, gesture and intonations generally used to establish the communicative intent of 1 - 2 word utterances.

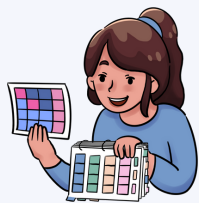
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AAC System Trials

The Participation Model is part of a dynamic assessment, intervention and monitoring cycle. Speech Pathology Australia (2020) recommends that this cycle occurs within the person's own environments. Bullimbal recognises that a student's school is a large part of each student's life and, therefore, that we need to work with each student's speech pathologist as part of that assessment, intervention and monitoring cycle.

In recognition of the fact that no one technology will meet all of an individual's communication needs (Speech Pathology Australia, 2020) we believe that every student should have access to both non-electronic and electronic robust AAC systems.

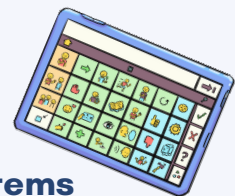
AAC System Trials at Bullimbal should include at least:



One robust non-electronic AAC system

and

At least two trials of robust electronic AAC systems



Further, at least two different language organisation systems need to be trialled from the following list:

Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD)



Proloquo2Go



Proloquo



TD Snap Core



Semantic Compaction based system such as LAMP or Unity



It is expected that the non-electronic and electronic systems match each other, ie. they are the same language organisation and symbol library.

Once the trial process has been completed, Bullimbal will support any robust AAC solution that provides the student with a non-electronic and electronic system with the same language organisation.

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AAC Implementation

Along with the Dos and Don'ts of AAC, we recognise that there are specific strategies that we need to use with communicators at different levels to help them to move to the next level.

Aided Language Stimulation

Aided Language Stimulation is also called modeling. It is used for teaching AAC and improving language acquisition for people with complex communication needs (Sennott et al, 2016) – and it means that we point to words on an AAC system as we speak. We need to model regularly through the day, in different situations, so that the student learns how they can use their system in those settings. We also need to model different reasons to communicate – share news, chat about activities, suggest places to go, complain, express opinions, share ideas, show off, make requests, refuse, ask questions, talk about your feelings, etc. AAC users need to learn to use AAC to do each of these things – so we need to show them how to do it.

"Speak AAC to Teach AAC"

The general rule for modelling AAC is to model 1 to 2 more words than the student is using. So if a student isn't using AAC yet, we would model 1 -2 words every time we speak. If they have started using 1 to 2 symbols on their AAC system, then we would use 3 to 4 symbols every time we speak. It's important that we still speak in full sentences, but we model key words in AAC.

AAC and Speech

Using AAC will not stop a person from learning to speak (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). In fact, once individuals use AAC they may make gains and improvements in their speech. We also know that modeling AAC helps language development, and, once the individual develops their receptive language and has access to communication, it can reduce their frustration.

Emergent Communicators

An emergent communicator is one who:

- typically uses behaviours, gestures, facial expression or body language to interact with others or to get their needs met
- may have awareness of symbols but have not yet made the connection that these symbols, signs or words can convey consistent meaning.
- mostly needs another familiar person to interpret their communication to others. Some messages may be guessed e.g. pushing something away or taking someone to an item, however they are not yet using a language mode (i.e. a sign, symbol or verbal word) to convey this message.
- often have a smaller repertoire of messages limited by the extent by which behaviours or gestures can convey a specific message

Definition taken from the Roadmap of Communicative Competence.

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To support an emergent communicator to develop more language and communicative competence, we need to do lots of language input using the system we expect them to use. It is also extremely important that we show them how they could use their AAC system to communicate the same things that they are already communicating in other ways. This means that if they communicate something by natural gesture e.g. pushing away an activity, we would say "oh, you're telling me you are finished". We need to do this consistently to help them to see that they can use the AAC system for their own communication.

Transitional Communicators

A transitional communicator is one who:

- is beginning to take ownership of their message and is using language (i.e. words, symbols or signs) to represent their message.
- may use their body and facial expression at times if most efficient but are learning that symbolic communication is needed to be autonomous.
- must have their own system (or at least one on trial), and use it to express autonomous messages.
- may range from using single words up to phrases and sentences.
- may seem competent in a familiar environment, but still needs to develop skills for success with unfamiliar people and environments

Definition taken from the Roadmap of Communicative Competence.

To support an transitional communicator to develop more communicative competence we need to continue aided language stimulation or modeling. We would also look at specific skills they need to develop e.g. learning to use little words, and then focus our modelling around their needs. Transitional communicators also need to develop a greater level of strategic competence to engage other people and allow them to talk with communication partners who may not be familiar with their system e.g. an introductory strategy.

Conventional Communicators

An independent / competent communicator is one who:

- is able to autonomously communicate within their home and community.
- can be understood clearly by the communication partner (either familiar or unfamiliar) regardless of mode of communication
- is able to clarify their message (without support from others) if the communication partner asks for clarification
- can use spelling (or other strategies) to communicate words that are not available in their AAC system
- can say whatever they want to say, whenever they want to say it and however they want to say it
- In some cases, the communicator may need their partner to read instructions, or use a tool in order to listen, but these instructions are readily accessible, and the communicator is able to demonstrate or direct the partner to read them. The competent communicator may not be fully independent but is fully autonomous.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Simplified version of the Communication Bill of Rights; modified by Kate Ahern

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Appendix A

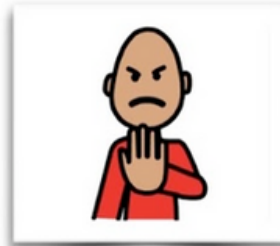
My Communication Bill of Rights



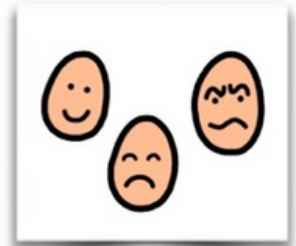
I have the right to my own friends and social life.



I have the right to ask for what and who I want and where to go.



I ALWAYS have the right to say, "no!"



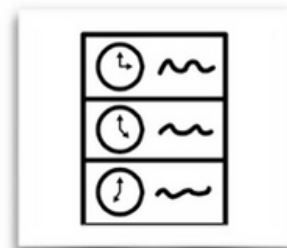
I have the right to say what I feel.



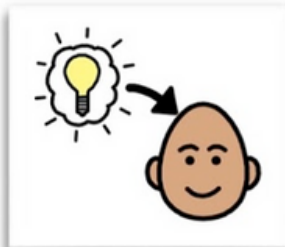
I have the right to make my own, real, choices.



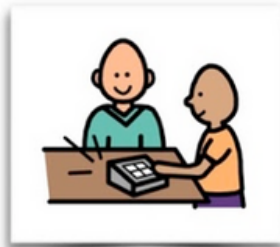
I have the right to say what think.



I have the right to ask for, get and give information.



I have the right to know about the people in my life and everything happening to me.



I have the right to be taught to communicate and have what I need.



I have the right to have my communication system (and other tools), to have them working and to be with people who know how to set up, use and fix my communication system.



I have the right to be heard and answered, even if I can't have what I want.



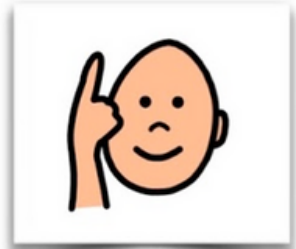
I have the right to be part of my community



I have the right to be treated with respect.



I have the right to be talked to and not about.



I have the right with be talked with in a way I understand.

Adapted from the NJC Communication Bill of Rights 2016, ASHA by Kate Ahern, M.S.Ed Mayer-Johnson Communication Symbols Used with Permission