

Communication
Policy

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Communication policy

Introduction

This policy should be read in conjunction with the recording policy, behavior support policy, safeguarding policy and the young people's individual care plans all about me, risk assessment and the ASD Guide.

Communication occurs all the time, throughout every aspect of and home life, school and socialising. It is a basic human right. It is the way that we make friends and build relationships, express our needs and feelings, make choices, learn and achieve independence. For children and young people, communication is integral to healthy development. When considering the Every Child Matters framework, children and young people will only be able to achieve the identified outcomes of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being, if their communication needs are fully met and supported.

The development of appropriate communication skills is therefore a priority for the children and young people in Short Breaks and our Children's Homes, as a means of accessing the curriculum and participating in everyday life experiences.

This policy outlines the aims, principles and strategies for the development of communication skills within our short break homes and children's homes. It reflects the consensus of opinion of the whole staff team and has the full agreement of the Responsible Individual. We believe that all children and young people have the right to understand and be understood in all aspects of life.

What is Total Communication?

“Total Communication” describes an approach that seeks to create a supportive means of communication to understand and be understood’ (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists). This means that children/young people and staff are encouraged to use every available form of communication, with a particular emphasis on what is relevant to individuals. A Total Communication approach acknowledges that communication is not simply about talking and emphasises the importance of body language, gesture, photos, symbols, signs, objects and more creative mediums such as music and art.

Total Communication is important for children and young people who may have difficulty speaking, reading, writing and understanding spoken words. It also supports the learning and understanding of all children and young people by presenting information in a variety of ways.

Aims

Our aims in supporting communication skills are that all children/young people including those with ASD will:

- Develop the necessary skills to communicate effectively, appropriately and confidently to the best of their ability. This includes the use of body movements, (e.g. whole body movements, eye gaze, facial expressions, or pointing), the use of objects of reference, on body signing, Intensive Interaction, Makaton signs, photos, picture communication symbols, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) books, symbol books and charts, communication software, a wide variety of communication aids, vocalisation, and speech.
- Develop the ability to listen, to understand, and to respond, at their level.
- Have access to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) aids, appropriate to the needs of individual pupils, including Makaton signing, PECS and electronic communication aids, such as iPads.

- Have their AAC and its implications included in their care plan.
- Be supported outside Short breaks and the Children's homes to ensure continuity.
- Be provided with structured opportunities to develop spontaneous language

The barriers for communication for some young people are:

- The need for increased processing time in order to take in and understand others communication
- Difficulties focusing on communication due to sensory distractions, heightened anxiety, preoccupation with other things etc.
- Lack of understanding of others feelings and emotions
- Have difficulties interpreting other people's facial expressions and body language
- Difficulty in social interactions; individuals may present as rude, anti-social, or shy, therefor finding some social events and interactions difficult.

Learning Styles

The teaching of communication skills takes place throughout the whole stay at Short Breaks and whilst children are living in our Children's Homes. Communication skills can be developed through individual, paired, or group activities such as young people's meetings. Children and young people will be encouraged to communicate with each other through working collaboratively and sharing their experiences as appropriate. This communication may be verbal, using signs, symbols, photos or electronic communication aids.

Staff use non-verbal communication such as symbols, signing and gesture as appropriate, to aid pupil understanding. Speech is used at a level appropriate to individual understanding, ranging from the use of one or two key words to phrases and sentences.

Teaching and learning takes place in a variety of settings, including educational visits, meal times, personal care, and play activities.

Additional input in communication skills is provided by Speech and Language Therapy Services (SALT) where needed.

Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)

The Speech and Language Therapists work on a consultative basis in conjunction with key workers and the management team. Assessment may involve observation in the school, Short Breaks, within the Children's Homes, individual assessments, or home visits.

Assessments with consent from parents/ Local Authority will be shared with Short Breaks and the Childrens Homes. General advice is also given to staff regarding the development of children's and young people's communication skills and whole staff training is provided as required. In addition more information can be found within a child EHCP, provided by the Local Authority.

Individual needs of the child/ young person

All young people that come to Short Breaks or to stay within our Children's Homes have their own needs, skills and risk, documented in their own care plan, risk assessment and behavior support plans. In addition if there are any concerns that young person may go missing or be at risk of child sexual exploitation there will also be a risk assessment for these areas in the young person file.

Sensory issues and sensory diets.

Some children and young people with ASD may have certain or specific sensory issues, which can result in unusual or uncomfortable perceptions of sound, light, sense, touch, smell and

sight. The young person may get upset, distracted or react in an aggressive manner due to the discomfort or pain they feel. Young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder often have sensory processing difficulties. They may seek additional sensory input, or they may avoid sensory experiences. They may present as hyper (over) responsive or hypo (under) responsive to sensations received from the environment. Within Short Breaks and the Children's Homes we will aim to reduce anxieties and distress by providing the following:

- An environment which is calm, and comfortable with few distractions if required.
- An environment with clear routine and structure, which also incorporates the elements of flexibility of thought.
- The reassurance that the child/ young person can ask for help and support and they will get it.
- Specific sensory support to match their individual needs and help them learn.
- Supported, well trained and dedicated staff team.

Training

All Westland Drive staff members are trained in Makaton, PECS and have basic training around autism, and are happy to support the other homes. Residential Children's services are currently commissioning more specialist training for the whole staff team through the training department. In addition to this, the specialist needs nurse regularly attends team meetings to discuss certain young people to support the care plan and behavior support plan for individual children and young people.

Useful people to contact and research and learning

National Autistic Society

www.autism.org.uk

Special Needs Nurses

01925 867843

Warrington Disability Partnership	01925 240064
Speech and Language Therapists	01925 251389
Educational Psychologists	01925 442917