

# Communication Supports for People who have Speech, Language and Communication Disabilities

People who have speech, language and communication disabilities <sup>1</sup> may require one or more communication supports to use your services and provide informed consent. Their right to get the communication supports they need, is protected by Canadian and international laws. <sup>2</sup>

This chart summarizes generic communication practices, tools and supports that an individual may require. Information provided here is not intended to be legal or clinical advice. Please consult a lawyer if you need legal advice and a Speech Language Pathologist if you need clinical service.

For information about resources and tools in this chart, go to: [www.cdacanada.com/communication-supports-article-12](http://www.cdacanada.com/communication-supports-article-12)

## Supports for people who speak, write, type, point to pictures, symbols or letters on a board, or use a communication device.

COMMUNICATION CONTEXT	SAMPLE PRACTICES	SAMPLE TOOLS	SAMPLE PERSONAL SUPPORTS
Identifying Communication Support Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Identify and document a person’s communication support needs in the areas of understanding, expressive communication, assistance with decision-making, reading, writing, and telephone use.</li> <li>▶ Confirm and ask the individual to authorize and describe the role of accompanying family members or support persons, if any.</li> <li>▶ Provide a quiet, distraction-free environment for communication.</li> <li>▶ Determine the information the individual wants to be shared with accompanying person(s).</li> <li>▶ Obtain signed confidentiality agreements from accompanying person(s), if required.</li> <li>▶ Engage a Speech-Language Pathologist, if required. <sup>3</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <a href="#">Communication Support Questionnaire.</a></li> <li>▶ <a href="#">Communication Passport or Instructions.</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <a href="#">Find out if an accompanying person has a specific role.</a> For example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ A <a href="#">communication assistant</a> conveys messages as generated, directed and / or approved by the individual and assists if the individual’s messages are not understood or if they require support to understand spoken or written information, or complete and sign forms.</li> <li>➢ A <a href="#">proxy communicator</a> or advocate communicates messages that are not necessarily generated by the individual but what they think the individual would communicate if they could.</li> <li>➢ An <a href="#">informal decision supporter</a> assists an individual to make a decision.</li> <li>➢ A <a href="#">substitute decision maker</a> makes decisions for an individual based on the person’s will and preferences.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> People who have speech, language and communication disabilities, not primarily caused by hearing loss may have cerebral palsy, cognitive, intellectual or developmental disability, learning disability, fetal alcohol syndrome, Down Syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, multiple sclerosis, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, aphasia, dementia, acquired or traumatic brain injury, head and neck cancer, Parkinson’s disease and other disabilities.

<sup>2</sup> Human rights laws; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Accessibility laws.

<sup>3</sup> A Speech Language Pathologist may be required if a person has no obvious way of communicating, if capacity to provide informed consent is questionable, if there is evidence of a conflict of interest, undue persuasion or coercion from support person(s) and in all critical communication contexts such as medical assistance in dying and justice settings.

COMMUNICATION CONTEXT	SAMPLE PRACTICES	SAMPLE TOOLS	SAMPLE PERSONAL SUPPORTS
<p><b>Communication Supports for Understanding Spoken and Written Information</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide <u>comprehension supports</u> as identified by the individual, such as providing extra time, using everyday language; eliminating jargon; checking for understanding; slowing rate of speech; pausing between sentences; chunking information; focusing attention; supporting reduced memory, and using language that is within the person’s lived experience.</li> <li>▶ Provide communication tools to facilitate understanding of spoken information.</li> <li>▶ Provide written information in accessible formats, such as plain language materials, alternate formats and accessible websites.</li> <li>▶ Engage a personal support person to assist with understanding spoken and or written information.</li> <li>▶ Demonstrate and document the individual’s understanding of critical information to make an informed decision.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Spoken Information</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Written words</li> <li>▶ Objects</li> <li>▶ Pictures</li> <li>▶ Diagrams</li> <li>▶ Context picture boards and books</li> <li>▶ Social Stories</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Written Information</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Plain language documents materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Simplified language</li> <li>➢ Short sentences</li> <li>➢ Key information</li> <li>➢ Minimal punctuation</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ Alternate formats</li> <li>▶ Website compatible with latest Website Content Accessibility Guidelines</li> </ul>	<p>A personal support person may <u>assist comprehension</u> by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Identifying when the individual may not be understanding information.</li> <li>▶ Using customized strategies to support the individual to attend and/or to remember information.</li> <li>▶ Rephrasing information in ways the person understands.</li> <li>▶ Relating information to the individual’s lived experience.</li> <li>▶ Using appropriate communication tools to facilitate understanding.</li> <li>▶ Assisting with reading and understanding written materials.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communication Supports for Expressive Communication</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide <u>expressive communication supports</u> for in-person interactions, such as use of preferred communication methods; asking one question at a time; asking open-ended questions; allowing time for responses; confirming that you understand intended message and personalized strategies the person wants you to use to facilitate expressive communication. For example: reading aloud or writing down what the person has selected on a communication board, or predicting a word or a meaning.</li> <li>▶ Ensure access to communication aids the person may use, such as a picture, symbol, letter board, boogie board, pen and paper, tablet, smart phone or communication device.</li> <li>▶ Provide topic boards, written key words and vocabulary, as required, to support communicate about a specific issue.</li> <li>▶ Engage an authorized personal support person, to assist with communication.</li> <li>▶ Ensure the individual generates and/or approves messages conveyed by the support person.</li> <li>▶ Provide support for writing such as accessible forms, assistance to complete forms, sign documents, take notes.</li> <li>▶ Provide alternative to telephone use, such as text, email, or to contact a person as authorized by the individual.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>In-Person Interactions:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <u>Personal communication aids</u> owned by the individual.</li> <li>▶ Generic communication aids for writing or spelling, such as a letter board, pen and paper, boogie board.</li> <li>▶ Text and picture <u>topic boards</u> for specific contexts, such as healthcare, legal, financial, justice situations.</li> <li>▶ Text and picture <u>topic boards</u> for decision-making.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Forms, Notetaking, Signatures:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Accessible, electronic forms</li> <li>▶ Alternate format forms</li> <li>▶ Electronic signatures / stamps</li> <li>▶ Audio / video note taking</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Telephone:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Email, video call, text.</li> <li>▶ Message relay services.</li> <li>▶ Authorized support person.</li> </ul>	<p>A personal support person may <u>assist expressive communication</u> by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Explaining how the individual communicates.</li> <li>▶ Communicating what the individual has generated or has directed them to convey.</li> <li>▶ Echoing and /or reformulating unclear messages.</li> <li>▶ Verifying intended meaning of the individual’s messages.</li> <li>▶ Using communication tools to facilitate expressive communication.</li> <li>▶ Transcribing information on forms as directed by the individual.</li> <li>▶ Taking notes.</li> <li>▶ Assisting with alternate signature arrangements as directed by the individual and witnessed by professional.</li> <li>▶ Assisting with telephone communication, if required.</li> </ul>

COMMUNICATION CONTEXT	SAMPLE PRACTICES	SAMPLE TOOLS	SAMPLE PERSONAL SUPPORTS
<p><b>Communication Supports to Make Decisions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide information about <u>local legislation</u> related to the decision-making context.</li> <li>▶ Ensure that decision-making is not deferred to unauthorized persons.</li> <li>▶ Provide the individual with the option to get assistance from others to make a decision.</li> <li>▶ Ensure access to the communication supports the individual needs to participate in any decision-making arrangement.</li> <li>▶ Determine that there is no evidence of undue persuasion, coercion or abuse of power.</li> <li>▶ Determine that the individual's preferences and decisions are acknowledged, honored and /or negotiated.</li> <li>▶ Determine if the decision was made independently; within a shared or supported decision-making arrangement as per <u>Canadian jurisdiction</u> or via a substitute decision maker.</li> <li>▶ Engage a <u>Speech-Language Pathologist</u>, in critical communication contexts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Plain language materials about the decision to be made and about local legislation related to decision-making.</li> <li>▶ <u>Talking Mats™</u></li> <li>▶ Text and picture <u>topic boards</u> to negotiate and make decisions.</li> </ul>	<p>A personal support person may assist by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Facilitating the person's right to autonomy, to take reasonable risks, <u>make choices and decisions</u>.</li> <li>▶ Acknowledging that the individual may be capable of making some decisions and require support to make other decisions.</li> <li>▶ If appropriate, using a <u>collaborate approach</u> with input from trusted people who know the person well.</li> <li>▶ Soliciting the individual's preferences, choices and decision.</li> <li>▶ Honoring and/or <u>negotiating alternate solutions</u> that take into account the individual's preferences.</li> </ul>

**Supports for people who communicate primarily through body language, vocalizations, facial expressions and behaviours.**

<p><b>Expression of will, choices and preferences</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Identify the individual's legal decision-maker.</li> <li>▶ <u>Solicit input</u> from people who know the individual well and have a long-term, close relationship with them.</li> <li>▶ Ensure decision-maker has taken into account the individual's known past and current preferences and non-preferences, will, values and beliefs, and intersectionality needs relating to health, emotional wellbeing, home language, gender, sexuality, religion, spirituality, ethnicity, culture, safety from abuse, neglect, self-harm or harm to others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Recording chart for the expression of choices and preferences</li> <li>▶ Life stories</li> <li>▶ Videos</li> <li>▶ Past spoken and written directives.</li> </ul>	<p>Personal Support Person(s) <u>may assist by:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Working together with the individual and other people who know them well to interpret, document and act upon their expressed preferences and non-preferences.</li> <li>▶ Taking into account an individual's known past and current preferences and non-preferences, will, values and beliefs, and specific intersectionality needs relating to health, emotional wellbeing, home language, gender, sexuality, religion, spirituality, ethnicity, culture, safety from abuse, neglect, self-harm or harm to others.</li> <li>▶ Recognizing that an individual's preferences and non-preferences may, in some situations inform decisions that are beyond their capacity to understand or express.</li> </ul>
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## Supplemental Information

You can get information about the practices, tools and supports referenced on this chart in our free, online learning modules which are available at [www.cdacanada.com/communication-supports-article-12](http://www.cdacanada.com/communication-supports-article-12)

The modules address Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). Article 12 states that people have a right to exercise their legal capacity to make decisions that affect them and to have the supports they may need to do this.

Our learning modules focus on the communication supports that people may require to make and communicate choices, preferences and decisions that matter to them. These supports may include practices, communication tools and personal supports to understand information, express opinions and make decisions. People have a right to these supports whether they make a decision independently, with assistance from other people or whether they rely on another person to make a decision on their behalf.

The learning modules are geared towards healthcare providers, lawyers, capacity assessors, guardians, justice professionals, social workers and disability services. They are also useful for people

who have disabilities that affect their communication, family members, speech language pathologists and augmentative communication clinicians.

### Learning Modules:

1. [Communication and Capacity: Context and Guiding Principles](#) (Barbara Collier, Speech Language Pathologist)
2. [Communication Disabilities: Barriers and Impact on Choice and Control](#) (Barbara Collier, Speech Language Pathologist)
3. [Legal Context for Exercising Capacity and Provision of Communication Supports](#) (Lana Kerzner, Lawyer)
4. [Communication Supports: Formal, Symbolic Communicators](#) (Barbara Collier, Speech Language Pathologist)
5. [Communication Supports: Informal, Non-Symbolic Communicators](#) (Dr. Jo Watson, Lecturer)

### Communication Disabilities Access Canada believes that:

- ▶ Communication is the foundation for exercising autonomy, expressing preferences and making decisions.
- ▶ People have a right to get the supports they need to empower them to control what happens in their lives whether

they make decisions independently, with support from trusted people or rely on a substitute decision-maker.

- ▶ Communication supports must be provided before a person's capacity can be determined.
- ▶ Communication supports differ in type and amount depending on how the person communicates, their support needs, the decision to be made and the skills of the person with whom they are communicating.
- ▶ People may require communication supports in one or more areas of understanding information, expressing opinions, preferences and decisions and making decisions.
- ▶ Support in decision-making is communication support.
- ▶ People who have speech, language disabilities may or may not require assistance to make decisions.
- ▶ Authentic communication is generated by a communicator, with or without assistance.
- ▶ It is the responsibility of the professional who is determining a person's capacity, to ensure that an individual has the supports they need to express preferences and decisions that matter to them.