

Top Tips for Communication Boards

People communicate in different ways. This includes:

- Spoken language, like English or Polish
- Sign language, like Irish Sign Language
- Sign systems, like Lámh
- Gestures, like pointing
- Facial expressions, like smiling
- Picture communication systems, like PECS
- High-tech communication systems, like Snap Core First.

It can be very frustrating for people who communicate in different ways, like pictures, to be in a situation where they don't have access to something to get their message across.

The new communication boards in our playgrounds will be helpful to support interactions between people who communicate in different ways.

What is a communication board?

A communication board is a board with pictures that can be used as a way to share messages. The communication boards in our playgrounds have pictures of things in the playground, action words, feelings, and words that can be used to request, like "more".



Communication boards are a form of **Total Communication**. This means that we use everything in our communication toolbox, including pictures, gestures, signs, and words, to get our message across.

Everyone should have a go at using our new communication boards and experience a new way to share messages!

Who are Communication Boards for?

✨ **Communication boards are for everyone!** ✨

- Children who are in the playground can use the board to play word games, plan, and talk about what they are going to do
- Children and toddlers who are learning language can use the pictures on the board to help them to understand new words and to put words together
- Children who have difficulties with understanding will benefit from being able to see a picture of what you are talking about
- Children who have difficulties with using language will benefit from being able to get their message across clearly, quickly, and effectively
- Children who find making speech sounds difficult and have difficulty being understood by adults or other children will benefit from being able to show you exactly what they are telling you about
- Adults can use the board as a way to start conversations with their child
- Adults who have difficulty with understanding or using language can use the board to share and receive messages

Here are some ways to get started with using our new communication boards

Using a communication board to support understanding:

The communication board will help children to make links between a real object, a picture and a spoken word. Visuals help us all to understand. A picture is more similar to an object than a spoken word.

- There are lots of things in playgrounds and a lot of potential new words for children! **Pick out one or two words to start.**
- **Point** to the picture and **say** the word, for example 'swing'.
- You can **make a gesture or a sign too** if it will help to support their understanding.
- Make sure to use the same word consistently with the picture.
- Then bring your children over to the swings.

You might need to **repeat** this routine many times before they understand the link between the word, the picture and the swings! We need to understand what a picture or a word means, before we can use it.

Using a communication board to support a child to use words or sentences:

- Bring your child over to the communication board
- If you know that their preferred activity is the slide, show them where this picture is on the board. **Say the word as you show them the picture.**
- **Encourage them to point** to the picture too. You can use hand over hand to help them if they are comfortable with this.
- Then **go to play on the slide.**
- Repeat this routine, and the word 'slide' many times. You can repeat the word on its own or in short phrases like 'Down the **slide!**'
- You can also give your child a sentence starter, such as 'I want..' This will give them an opportunity to use the word expressively and finish your sentence.

You can point to two different pictures to help your child to put words together. Like 'big' + 'slide,' 'small' + 'slide' or 'finished + slide'. This will help to expand your child's language use.

Using a communication board to support your child to ask for what she/he wants:

A communication board can be helpful for children who use pictures to request things that they want. This communication board is new, and it will take time for all children to learn what picture options are on the communication board. It might be overwhelming for some children, even if they are used to using pictures to communicate.

- First your child must understand what the pictures on the communication board mean.
- Keep bringing them over to the board and showing them the picture as you use each word or piece of equipment.
- If they are gesturing or looking towards their preferred activity, like the zipline, **use hand over hand** to guide their hand to the picture and **say the word**.
- If your child points or gestures to a picture to make a request on their own, **say the matching word**. Reward them with lots of praise.

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