National Joint Committee for Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities

Communication Supports Checklist for Programs Serving Individuals with Severe Disabilities

The “Communication Supports Checklist” represents current best practices in communication for programs serving individuals with severe disabilities, according to this panel of experts from the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR), the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), and the Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (USSAAC).

Selected Best Practices

- Team collaboration is essential for effective service
- Offer multiple choices in activities throughout day
- Ensure that augmentative communication devices are in good working order at all times
- Staff in programs should arrange materials so individuals without symbolic communication skills can indicate their interests or requesting through the use of natural gestures and behavior signals
- Assessments should measure opportunities for communication across environments
- Use a team intervention model that includes family members, professional peers, support personnel and other significant communication partners
- The team selects and prioritizes goals based on their importance and potential impact on an individual’s quality of life
- The team considers environmental as well as individual learner goals
- The team targets communication goals primarily in an individual’s natural environments during typical interactions, rather than in isolated environments
- The team uses pull-out intervention only when necessary
- The team provides opportunities to communicate across all environments
- The team uses an individual’s current communication systems while promoting new skill acquisition
- The team uses communication supports and systems that are appropriate to each individual’s cognitive abilities
- The team plans and implements communication assessments that lead directly to functional communication intervention goals and objectives
- Describes and documents functional communication abilities and needs within specific contexts (e.g., educational settings, living environments, recreational environments, etc.)
- Incorporate functional communication into activities of daily living