Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired



Outreach Programs

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The Communication Matrix  
by Charity Rowland, Ph.D., \_©1990, 1996, 2004

WHAT IS IT? & HOW DO I DO IT?

By Sara Kitchen, TSBVI Outreach, September, 18, 2009

# What Is It?

## Assesses Communication Skills

* For individuals at the EARLIEST stages of communication development
* For individuals who use ANY form of communication, including pre-symbolic or alternative and augmentative forms up to those who use abstract forms.

## Organization of Assessment

* Four reasons to Communicate:

1. Reject/Refuse
2. Obtain/Request
3. Socialize
4. Get/Give Information

* Seven levels of communicative competence that fall into three categories:

1. Non-intentional Communication
2. Intentional Communication
3. Symbolic communication

## Non-Intentional Communication:

Behavior is interpreted by parent / caregiver

### Level I: Pre-Intentional Behavior

Behaviors are reflexes of the child’s internal state.

Examples include: fussing, wriggling-wet/tired/hungry, quiet but alert-fed/rested

### Level II: Intentional Behavior

Behaviors are under child’s control but, child does not yet know he can affect parent.

Examples include: vocalizations, turning toward/away from desired object/person, taking desired object, etc.

# Intentional Behavior vs. Intentional Communication

* You will know your child is intentionally trying to communicate when she/he:
  + Orients toward you by looking at you, facing you, or reaching toward you before acting
  + Waits for your response
* Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference, but it is a big deal when the child ilearns that he /she can affect others!
* Moving from intentional behavior to intentional communication is a big step!

## Intentional Communication (a.k.a. pre-symbolic)

It’s about the here and now:

### Level III: Unconventional Communication

* Effective but not generally socially acceptable.
* Examples include tugging at someone, whining, jumping up and down, etc.

### Level IV: Conventional Communication

* Learned through experience and modeling from others
* Examples include: pointing, nodding/shaking head, waving hello/goodbye, tapping someone on the shoulder
* Children who are visually impaired need to be shown because they don’t see other people doing them.

## Symbolic Communication

We can talk about the past and future:

### Level V-Concrete symbols:

* Symbols look, feel move like, make sounds like what they represent, such as the container that the frozen juice comes from or the top of the juice container glued to a piece of cardboard.

### Level VI-Abstract Symbols:

* Symbols don’t look, feel, sound like, move like or smell like what they represent and are used one at a time, such as the written or spoken word “juice”.

### Level VII-Language:

* Abstract symbols are combined to form short sentences, such as “want juice”.

# How Do I Do It?

## Instructions

* Use observations, interviews (including the Communication Matrix Especially for Parents), and interactions with the child to gain this information.
* Meet as a team, and ask yourselves each question under the “ASK THESE QUESTIONS” column.
* If the answer is “YES”, circle the letter next to the behavior the child uses.
* Only check off behaviors child uses independently (without assistance or prompting) and consistently (occurring most times when opportunity arises)
* Make a note where child is using a behavior inconsistently. This behavior might be considered “Emerging”.
* If the answer is “NO” move on to the next box.
* Transfer the information to the student profile sheet.
* Shade in the boxes where the child shows competence (uses at least one behavior independently and consistently)
* Put stripes in the boxes where the child shows emerging behaviors (uses behavior independently but not consistently).

## Share the Results

* Copy the information the team filled out from pages 3-6 for each team member to keep in their notebook.
* Copy the completed profile and give one to each team member.
* Copy the information from “Especially for Parents” if used.