



# **Social Communication:**

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## **Preparing the Environment to Support a Student's Success**

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# 1. Be prepared in advance

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- Have yourself ready first
- Know the plan
- Have all visuals and materials prepared
- Be prepared for the unexpected
- Have agreement with other adults for support

## 2. Prioritize the student, not the task

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- What is motivating?
- What is fun?
- Where does this child want to be?
- Communication temptations
- Look for opportunities
- External supports (mats, timers, etc)
- Messy and moving
- Seek input from others on the team

# 3. Organize the environment

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- a place for everything:
  - toy cubbies
  - clothes hooks
  - visuals
  - book shelves
  - art bins
  - off-limit areas
- use labels and pictures
- allow enough time for activities
- allow time for impromptu interactions
- allow notice/ time for transitions
- have materials ready in advance

# 4. Make the environment predictable

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- establish a routine and stick to it!
- give advanced notice
- review daily plans
- set clear limits
- use strategies:
  - social scripts
  - social stories
  - picture schedules
  - picture sequences
  - timers
  - sign language
  - first-then statements
  - if-then statements
  - organize tasks into concrete chunks
  - token systems

# 5. Plan peer involvement

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- Pre-teach
- Reinforce
- Peer prompting rather than adult
- Environmental expectations
- Modeling (language, actions, play)
- Structured activities
- Shared problem-solving tasks
- Shared story-telling
- Deliberate partnering

## 6. Know the student's developmental capabilities and be realistic

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- Splinter skills matter: be aware!
- Consider the child's perspective
- Frustration/ shut-down as result of over-pitching
- Let yourself (and the child) off the hook

## 7. Choose one objective at a time

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- Know the skill you're targeting
- Know how you're addressing that skill
- Follow-through & keep your word: reinforce
- Avoid inadvertently setting student up to "fail"
- Let other things go
- Make sure others know what you're up to

## 8. Be willing to adjust in the moment

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- Behavior is communication
- The adult needs to think and tailor quickly
- The best laid plans may not work but,
- Something will work

## 9. Recognize/ respect the student's personal agenda

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- *BEHAVIOR IS COMMUNICATION*
- the student's agenda is an asset for your work together
- If it's not a choice: ***Tell***, don't ***Ask***

# Children with Vulnerable Communication Skills

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## Benefit from Visuals to Support:

- Receptive Language
- Expressive Language
- Social-pragmatic Language
- Behavior

# Receptive Language:

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- To reinforce understanding of heard directions  
(e.g., one-step to multi-step directions)
- To reinforce understanding of questions, comments, statement, and choice options

# Expressive Language:

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- To regulate others' behavior/ get needs met
  - request
  - make choices
  - comment
  - decline/protest
- To develop spoken grammar/ vocabulary skills
- To increase speech intelligibility
- To alleviate frustration



# Pragmatic Language:

(Regulating others' behavior/ sustaining social interactions)

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- Joint Attention
- Shared Affect
- Turn-taking
- Reciprocal Interactions
- Initiation
- Topic Maintenance
- Response to questions, comments
- Posing questions, comments

# Behavior:

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- Behavior is communication
- Removes the interpersonal dynamic
- Tools to present cause-effect concepts (e.g., “first-then”)
- Visual representation of sequences and routines

# Use Pictures to Create Visual Learning Tools:

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- Digital photographs (.jpg)
- *Visual Strategies for Improving Communication*
- *Boardmaker*
- *Power Point*
- *Inspiration*
- *PECS*
- Hand-drawn (adult or child)
- *Google Images*
- *Clip Art/ photos*

- Social scripts; social stories
- Daily classroom schedules
- Individual work sequences
- Story-telling scaffolds
- Group activity sequences
- Pacing boards for motor speech
- Transition sequences
- Self-help sequences
- Safety signals
- Behavior modification systems
- Choice boards
- Individual or classroom listening activities
- Decoding scaffolds

# Resources

## *Boardmaker*

Solana Beach, CA: Mayer-Johnson, Inc.

Phone: 800-588-4548

<http://www.mayer-johnson.com>

## *Inspiration* [Computer software]

Inspiration Software, Inc.

7412 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy

Suite 102

Portland, OR 97225

Phone: 800-877-4292

<http://www.inspiration.com>

Hodgdon, L. (1995). *Visual strategies for improving communication: Practical supports for school and home*. Troy, MI: QuirkRoberts Publishing.

Phone: 248-879-2598

<http://www.usevisualstrategies.com>

## *Picture Exchange Communication System*

Pyramid Educational Consultants

226 West Park Place, Suite 1

Newark, DC 19711

Phone: 888-732-7462

<http://www.pecs.com/index.html>