**TIP SHEET**

**Child’s Communication Binder**

A communication binder is a book with pictures arranged in a variety of categories that a child uses to indicate his needs or wants. The categories and pictures included depend on the child’s needs and what he is not able to clearly communicate through speech or gestures. Some routines and rules are included to support the child’s comprehension of classroom expectations.

**Why use a Communication Binder?**

Children with special needs sometimes find it hard to be understood when they are in a busy classroom or meeting someone for the first time. Reasons for this may include:

- Unclear speech
- Limited vocabulary
- Difficulty making eye contact
- Forgetting what to say or do when feeling overwhelmed

A child who uses a communication binder is more able to express himself in a way that other children and adults will understand. This may decrease the likelihood that he will resort to crying, hitting, kicking, or having tantrums in an attempt to get his needs met.

A communication binder can also encourage a child to play with and talk to other children without needing an adult to “speak” on his behalf. For example, a child can use his communication binder to show a friend what game he would like to play at recess. Some children have sections on hobbies such as collecting stickers or baseball cards. Finally, a communication binder can promote sharing and conversation about what a child has done at home and at daycare each day.

If the child has a speech-language pathologist or support person from an agency, s/he may provide suggestions about what to include in the communication binder and how to encourage the child to use it.

**What to include in a Communication Binder**

We have provided a sample communication binder to get you started. The communication binder is based on a series of labeled picture symbols that are easily understood by children and adults.

Below is a brief description of each possible section and ideas for its contents:
Basic Needs
Placing pictures of basic needs at the front of the binder will make it easier for the child to communicate in a hurry. This section usually includes pictures of requests such as “eat”, “drink”, “washroom”, “more”, and other individualized needs for which the child requires help communicating clearly.

In My Classroom
Pictures in this section include classroom activities and routines. Since the binder is a support to the child’s expressive communication, the pictures should include activities that a child may request, as well as transitions for which the child may need assistance. Changes to the child’s routine such as “no outdoor play/ gym” can be included so that the child knows what to expect.

Let’s Play
A child can use these pictures when he is playing with others or participating in group activities. These pictures can assist the child with the social aspects such as asking to play or knowing whose turn it is. Game and activity choices can also be included to allow the child to specify with what he wants to play.

Reminders
Classroom rules should be included in this section. These pictures encourage positive behaviour by showing what the child needs to do rather than what he should not do. The child can be directed to refer to this section when extra support is required. The pictures should be personalized to include any sensory supports such as the use of a fidget toy at circle time.

Show and Tell
You may want to add a photograph or picture to the binder every week to share with the child’s friends and family. This encourages conversation about something new or of special interest to the child and can help him develop social connections. For example, a photograph could depict the child playing a favourite game with his friends.

What I Did at Daycare
This is a conversation page that can be photocopied and completed by you and the child each day. It can help the child remember what he has done at daycare so that he can “talk” about it with his parents at home. The conversation page can be laminated and marked with a dry-erase pen.

What I Did at Home
This is a conversation page that can be photocopied and completed by the child and his parents each evening. It can encourage him to share his life with the teacher and classmates. This page can also be laminated and marked with a dry-erase pen.

How to Make a Communication Binder

You will need
• A computer and printer
• A thin three-ring binder
• 10 three-hole clear page protectors
• 5 three-hole page dividers
• Markers and pencil crayons
• Stickers and stick-on labels
• Glue or tape

Steps
1) Print the pages for the communication binder by clicking on the Adobe Acrobat print icon.
2) Decorate the cover with the child. You may want to glue his picture on the cover.
3) Place each page inside a page protector and add to the binder.
4) Put page dividers between sections.

The child’s communication binder is ready to use.

Personalizing the Child’s Communication Binder
Communication binders are designed to grow with the person using them. The key to increasing the child’s communication skills at home and at daycare is to be flexible and creative.
Child's Communication Binder, continued

If the picture symbols in our communication binder do not suit your needs, feel free to create your own using computer clip art, your own drawings, photographs, pictures from magazines or by visiting the Visuals Engine. Just make sure that the pictures are clear and easy for the child to see. Print or type a label in lower case letters above each picture you add to the binder. It will be easier for the child to learn what each picture represents when everyone uses the same words to describe it.

If you find that a binder is too large for the child to handle or carry around, pictures can be placed in a mini photo album or glued into a paper notebook. Sometimes, pictures are glued onto index cards and attached to a colourful plastic key ring. This is useful if the child only requires pictures for guidance in specific situations such as asking another child to play.

If the child consistently uses words or gestures to express certain needs and wants, the pictures representing them can be removed from the binder. Pictures representing words or gestures that are new to the child can be added instead.

**Teaching the Child How to Use a Communication Binder**

Children who are comfortable using the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or visual schedules will probably find it easy to use a communication binder. When introducing the communication binder to a child, it is best to review the pictures in each section with him at the time that they will be used. This way you can make sure that he understands the meaning of each picture. Here are some tips on introducing the child to a communication binder:

**Include the Communication Binder in Daily Routines**

When going through daily routines open the communication binder and point to the related picture(s) in the binder. Start by guiding the child’s hand to a picture and labeling it. For example, “It’s snack time.”

**Include the Communication Binder in Daily Conversations**

If you are having difficulty understanding the child when he is trying to tell you something, point to the binder and say, “Show me”, or, “Use your pictures”. If your circle time includes having children tell something about themselves, you can encourage the child to show the pictures that he has put in the “Show and Tell” section.

**Make the Binder Useful to the Child**

Make sure that the contents include pictures of relevant, desired objects and activities. Reinforce the child’s use of the binder by providing the items requested whenever possible.

The child is ready to use a communication binder independently when he:

1) Knows what the pictures in the binder mean
2) Is able to open the binder and turn its pages
3) Understands when he needs to use the binder
4) Can get someone’s attention and show them the binder

**For more information:**

- Visit the VISUAL ENGINE to make and print your own pictures.
- Read the following Tip Sheets on Using visuals and Picture Exchange Communication System.
Basic needs

- more
- eat
- wash hands
- get dressed
- hurt
- quiet
In my classroom

circle time
sand table
snack time
play
blocks
cut and paste
Let's play

- hello
- can I play?
- how do you play?
- I like that one
- what do you want to play?
- Let's play again
Let's play

more

my

no one to play with

my turn

your turn

I'm going to get you
Reminders

- sit
- sit down
- quiet
- loud
- don't hit others
- touch gently
Reminders

- no biting
- talk
- no spitting
- wipe face
- raise your hand
- listen
Show and tell
What I did at school

- storybook
- sand table
- play
- cut and paste
- snack time
- blocks
- circle time
What I did at home

Date: ___________

This is what ______________ did at home today:

- watch a video
- storybook
- dough
- music
- bubbles
- puzzle
- colour
- computer

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