

# Curriculum Scheme of Work

## My Communication



**Preview of first 3 pages from  
My Communication  
Basic Principles**

**Equals SLD (Semi-Formal) Curriculum Schemes of Work**

***My Communication***

**Basic Principles**

The Equals Communication SoW centres around the basic premise that communication is, at its core, a fairly simple business, but that 'education' has made it unnecessarily complicated for those with severe learning difficulties. We have perhaps, been far too concerned with the notion of being literate rather than the notion of being a communicator. We contend that communication is at the heart of being a social human being, and being a social human being that is at the heart of this document.

Equals Communication SoW argues that we only need three essentials in order to communicate:

1. A motivation (a reason) for communicating
2. A means (a method) of communicating
3. Someone (a partner or partners) to communicate to.

Because these three are **SO** fundamental, we have set them out as the 3Ms - motivation, means and mate. And if you want a little rhyme it becomes

**Motivation, means and mate:  
It's all you need to communicate**

If we can provide all three (and it is assumed that the communicative partner(s) have time to communicate otherwise they are not effective partners!) we can at least provide the basis for teaching communication effectively to all learners. All are equally important, but it may be that schools have in the past, concentrated too much on means without giving sufficient thought to motivation and communicative partners.

Communication is a holistic process; if we can constantly tap into motivation and consistently provide someone to communicate to, all learners will have many more opportunities to practice and perfect the means that are best suited to them.

This SoW is divided into ten basic sections within the overarching title of Communication. In all of these areas, staff must be mindful of the three communicative essentials (the 3 Ms) and we have tried to marry them together as far as we can. The ten areas of learning are not developmental or linear either in nature or the way they might be worked on. Imperative communications will generally come (developmentally) before declarative communications, but they will continue for all of our lives. We all seek to express our wants and needs to others in ways that will get them met no matter how old and sophisticated we are. This is not therefore a SoW which starts at the beginning, though there is an element of greater complexity as we go through the areas of learning.

### The ten areas of communicative learning

1. **Imperative communications** are primarily based on meeting specific or general needs and wants. They are not likely to be pre-intentional when used by learners with SLD, though they may be when used by learners with PMLD. Imperative communications are centred around motivation and it is therefore absolutely key that we establish a bank of personalised and effective motivations for each individual learner.
2. **Following instructions** falls into the realm of receptive rather than expressive communications and is the exception to the rule that applies in every other area of learning about communication in this SoW. That is **ALL** other sections are about the learners' direct involvement in taking some control of the communication experience. Following instructions are however, a necessary part of communicative learning since it has conforming to normative expectations at its base. Since Theory of Mind (ToM) - the recognition that other people have different thoughts, feelings and understandings to ourselves, and a significant factor in the development of empathy - doesn't emerge until around four years old with neuro-typical learners, it seems reasonable to assume that many of those on the SLD spectrum may not naturally develop ToM. We might therefore need to consciously teach it, and recognising that following instructions is an essential part of learning may be one lead in.
3. **Declarative communications** are communications for the sake of themselves, as in for example *'Isn't it a lovely day'*. They are not meant to gain anything from the recipient other than joint attention and acting as a point of contact, but are essentially social communications, expressed for the sake of communicating. The ability to **instigate** communicatively through declarative communications is a key part of working at P4 and above and is one of the markers (along with for example, the ability to follow simple instructions) which indicate severe rather than profound learning difficulties.

Declarative communications indicate that the act of social communication is sufficient motivation for the learner and is an essential part of social communication for the vast majority of all human beings, including those with SLD. The exception to this rule often arises when working with learners who have an additional autistic spectrum disorder; not all learners with SLD/ASD dislike social interactions, but a significant number might. This does not mean that we shouldn't teach social communication or social interaction or declarative communications, just that we will have to differentiate the teaching.

4. **Dynamic communications** are declaratives that are specific to a person, or group of persons, and work like a catchphrase or an 'in joke'. They are generally funny or dramatic and are a short hand 'bonding' reference point, as for example, nicknames. Dynamic communications are particularly open to being non-verbal, such as a special handshake or a thumbs up.
5. **Narratives** are the telling by learners of both factual or fictional stories. These are not scripted (as in a book) but are derived from memory and repetitive practice. They are usually quite short – a minute or two in the telling - and describe events or relate interests, biographical information, jokes, stories etc. Narratives are the way we all communicate about our lives – good, bad, funny, sad – to those who matter to us. They are the essential glue of social humanity.
6. **Formal social interactions with familiar and unfamiliar people** require a particular way of behaving that take in a society's understandings of what constitutes appropriate language, familiarity, attention, time, proximity and touch. They are generally rule bound and will be societal bound.
7. **Personalised reading and writing** for those with SLD is usually confined to single familiar and often used words. These are usually learned through whole word recognition and it is not necessary to explore the mysteries of phonics. There will probably be a number of words that apply to all learners, especially social sight words such as Toilet, TOILET, Gents, GENTS, Gentlemen, Ladies, LADIES, Lavatory, plus the innumerable symbols which indicate Gents and Ladies. There will be a number of other, less complicated, social sight words such as 'exit' and 'pull' etc. In addition to these, there will also be a bank of very personalised motivating words that will very much depend on the individual learners' interests.
8. **Non-verbal, behavioural communications** can form a considerable part of a learner's communicative repertoire, especially if that learner has what are considered severe challenging behaviours. If it is a cliché that all behaviours are communications, it is a cliché that is true, and we ignore them at our peril. There is however, sometimes a tendency to stop these communications because they are associated with challenging behaviour, rather than turning them into contextualised and appropriate communications.

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Learning Intention	Teaching and Learning Activities	Notes
<p><b>To work on I want..... communications</b></p>	<p>Although imperative communications are built around wants and needs, <i>'I want'</i> is different to <i>'I need'</i> and probably comes first. One may for example need to go to the toilet, but might not want to. Needs and wants can of course coincide in essence but be different in detail. One may need to eat (a calorie controlled) lunch but want to eat a double jam doughnut.</p> <p><i>'I want'</i> is centred around motivation and is therefore naturally more powerful than <i>'I need'</i> which will probably have to be learned over time.</p> <p><i>'I need'</i> communications will be discussed in <b>Non-verbal, behavioural communications</b> in this SoW.</p>	
<p><b>To build up a bank of clear and unambiguous likes and dislikes</b></p>	<p>See ISE (Individualised Sensory Environment) in the Basic Principles.</p> <p>It may not be necessary at this stage for the learner to be using a formal communication system such as sign, symbol or speech. You are looking for the learner to make a clear choice which may be positive (I want) or negative (I don't want) but that could easily be by vocalising, eye-gazing, pointing to, taking, holding, turning away from, pushing away etc.</p>	<p>The purpose of spending a considerable amount of time with all learners in building a bank of likes and dislikes is to <b>establish a motivation to communicate.</b></p>

	There may however be a third option which appears as a negative, but strictly speaking is not, and is indicated by indifference (I don't care).	
<b>To make a supported positive choice from two given options</b>	<p>Working from the learner's known likes and dislikes (see ISE in Basic Principles) offer two clear and obvious opposing choices to the learner, for example orange juice or vinegar/fresh lemon juice; a crisp or a lettuce leaf; raisin or dry pasta.</p> <p>It may not be necessary at this stage for the learner to be using a formal communication system such as sign, symbol or speech. Choosing is enough.</p>	It may of course be the case that the learner really likes vinegar or fresh lemon juice, in which case these get added to the list of likes and you have to search harder for the dislikes.
<b>To make a supported negative choice from one given option</b>	<p>Working from the learner's known dislikes, offer one clear and obvious dislike to the learner, for example vinegar, fresh lemon juice, lettuce leaf, dry pasta. It is not enough that the learner has previously shown indifference to this object. The learner must actively dislike it.</p> <p>It may not be necessary at this stage for the learner to be using a formal communication system such as sign, symbol or speech. Rejecting is enough.</p> <p>You are looking for a specific (and acceptable) means of rejection such as pushing away, turning away.</p> <p><b>It is difficult to over-emphasise how important learning to make an appropriate negative choice is.</b> So many challenging behaviours derive from those in control of learning (staff, parents, therapists for example) insisting that learners do something, be with someone, be in a certain place, that the learner does not want to do, be with, be in. Because the learner has severe (or indeed, profound) communication difficulties she may not be able to eloquently and appropriately express this dissatisfaction.</p>	<p>Remember that <b>effective</b> communication is about making one's meaning clear. You are looking for a clear and socially acceptable indication that the learner does not want .....</p> <p>This whole issue is discussed in detail in <i>Non-verbal Behavioural Communications</i></p>

	<p><b>Learning how to communicate a negative choice positively is one of the most important communication skills we can give to any learner.</b></p>	
<p><b>To establish a bank of each learner's favourite imperative words</b></p>	<p>Such words, usually nouns, <b>MUST</b> be established favourites. That is, they must be motivating to the learner.</p> <p>It is not necessary at this stage to consider sentence structure or sentence strips (if using symbols). There is also no necessity to start with <i>'I want...'</i> or to put in <i>'Please'</i> or <i>'Thank you'</i></p> <p><b>ALL</b> staff who are in any way in daily contact with the learner must ensure that they are competent at signing the individual's favourite words. Class staff must ensure that several symbols are prepared for each word so that there's always a spare if necessary.</p> <p><b>BEWARE</b> that the bank of words is accurate since preferences can and probably will change over time. It will be good practice to check the continued validity of the preferences at the beginning of every academic year at least.</p>	<p>The key elements here are that learners are both confident and able to communicate using single words for highly motivating objects.</p> <p>We need to be aware that some choices, preferences, refusals are specific to time and place, for example, 'yes' at school but 'no' at home or vice versa.</p>
<p><b>To gain the attention of another person</b></p>	<p>In order to be confident in communicating, the learner needs to know that they have the ability to gain the attention of another person (means) <b>AND</b> that they will be listened to (mate).</p> <p>This is a theme that will run through a number of the learning avenues in this SoW.</p>	