



FACT SHEET

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Creating a Need to Communicate

Individuals who are deafblind may show beginning communication skills in many ways; body movement, gestures, facial expressions, vocalizing, use of objects or people, pointing to pictures, or more formal systems. As these skills begin to develop, it may be helpful to create a need for increasing the use of these new communication forms.

1. You may do movements together with the individual which the person really enjoys (e.g., rocking, dancing, or stirring batter). You can stop your movement, pause for a few seconds, and see if the **individual indicates they want to continue** (body movement, facial expression, gestures, vocalizing, etc.) This is the beginning of communicating needs and wants.

2. As the individual becomes familiar with various routines, you can watch to see if they **anticipate each step of the routine**. As you do the familiar routine, pause before moving on to the next step of the activity. During the waiting period of a few seconds, watch for movement, body posture, facial expression, gestures, vocalizing, etc., which indicates that the individual wants to complete the activity. (For example, you may assist the individual with dressing and may pause after the socks are placed on their toes. The individual may wiggle their toes to indicate he wants to finish dressing.)

3. Create a need to communicate within the routine/task by **“forgetting” to put out all materials** they will need for finishing the task (e.g., putting out a can of soup without the pan, putting out the toothpaste without the toothbrush, or placing a desired object just out of reach). The individual will then need to ask for the missing item in whatever way they can. You should not, however, interrupt their independence by removing materials they are currently using. It is also not recommended to insist they describe what they are doing in order to continue the task (e.g., the teacher removes the child’s cookie for each bite until the child says/signs/ gestures, “I want the cookie”). If you interrupt by removing materials during the activity, the individual may feel punished and may not wish to communicate. If you block their independence by requesting a description of what they are doing, they may stop functioning independently and may always wait to be prompted to continue actions.

4. After the individual expresses their desire to continue these activities, it is very important to **let them know that you understood their attempts** to communicate. You may say “Oh, you need the toothbrush!” or “You want your socks on?”, etc. Your movements as you speak can be an imitation of their movement. Your statements should tell them that you “heard” what they were saying **Be sure that your facial expression, body language, vocalizations, and speech all give a message of positive feelings about his communication.**