

# Personal Communication Passports

## Use of Video

By Sally Millar

**Can you have a video passport?**

**If you have a video, is a paper Passport necessary?**

A video record may share the same aim and function as a paper/booklet based Passport - e.g. to support a person across transitions - nevertheless it is not really quite the same thing as a Passport. It might at first seem that a written Passport is unnecessary if a video record can be made instead. However videos, although immensely valuable, should be used to supplement - and perhaps, on occasion, to substantiate - Passports, **not to replace them**. Here are five main reasons why videos should not replace 'paper-based' Passports:

1. Videos are not as immediate and practical as little booklets which can be carried around with the person at all times and can be pulled out of a pocket or bag and the relevant section read within a minute or so, in any setting. To play a video or DVD, access to VCR and TV equipment (or DVD player / computer) is required, as is the time to watch the whole tape through. Often staff will take a video home to watch, which makes it more like 'background information' than a functionally useful 'on the spot' resource. There are certain situations (e.g. emergency admission to hospital) in which viewing a video is impractical, whereas a little booklet would be instantly accessible and useful.
2. A video is an accurate record of a particular activity (or sequence of activities) at a particular moment in time, in its own particular context. It cannot easily be a synthesis of **all** of the many different activities, views and experiences of the child in the way that a written Passport can be. In particular it is difficult to show things like different behaviour or styles of interaction with different people, or sensory information.
3. Making a video may not have involved the multidisciplinary collaborative process, stretched out over time, involving also parents and family, with extended discussion, redrafting, ongoing editing and revision etc. Instead, the emphasis tends to be more on the on the immediate situation (and sometimes on the technology).
4. You can capture important events on video but there is no guarantee that people viewing it afterwards will understand what they are seeing. The only way to ensure that the video is clear is to edit the video and add explanatory captions and extensive commentary. This is possible (given funds to employ professionals, or, in-house, with digital video and good/easy video editing software) but demands considerable technical experience/skill and loads of time (that scarcest of all

resources!).

5. In certain circumstances, children, families, or individual adults (or other professionals, from an ethical standpoint) may be unhappy about video breaching the values of privacy and dignity, especially about intimate or bodily matters, or about bad behaviour. That can have undesirable consequences. For example, such topics/elements may be 'glossed over' or misrepresented to avoid embarrassment, or may frequently simply be completely omitted from the video passport. That's OK as far as the video goes but it may mean that key principles of Passports are being breached, i.e. that it be comprehensive, accurate and honest in passing on key information. A written format allows for more flexibility and discretion. For example, you can use jokes and oblique hints etc. to recast the written word to remove offensiveness, but you cannot easily manipulate the impact of an image in the same way. You can design a paper-based Passport with detachable sheets that can be added/removed for certain situations, 'private pocket' at the back of the book etc.).

### **Permission Granted? Protection, Privacy and Confidentiality**

If you make a video or a multimedia passport you need to be very very careful that you have obtained the right level of written permission. Once digital video (or other material in digital format) is made, it can be quite hard to 'control' its uses. People can copy it and before you know it, it may appear on YouTube or wherever. You may think that the permission form that you already have signed by client or family, for an original paper Passport will cover it, but you will need to review that form rigorously, and if necessary update it to cover viewing by an 'unknowable' audience, perhaps including on websites. You need to think about whether a 'blanket' once- and-for-all permission is appropriate or whether there should be a clause ensuring that the family is informed and asked about any new potential uses/ audiences (such as sharing via email or the internet). You also need to consider whether the client and/or their family fully understand the full ramifications of what they are signing - and what you can do if they don't.

You will also need to review all of your Privacy and Confidentiality guidelines and procedures to ensure that video material is appropriately covered. Also what technological means may be at your disposal to protect files or conceal identities.

### **Visual Material is great!**

All that said, there are, of course, many excellent things about the use of video (or visual material displayed in similar formats such as DVD, slideshows or video embedded in Powerpoint or similar multimedia software) in support of written Passports. (Apart from anything else, with digital video you can save out clips from the video as still photos, which can be very useful in a traditional paper-

based Passport.) Here are five examples

1. 'A picture is worth a thousand words'; video obviously helps greatly to get an overall impression of a person, and/or to **see** how to lift and handle a person, organize a computer work-station or put together a complicated set of harness straps, rather than just to have it described.
2. Video can be quite quick to make.
3. Children and adults usually like watching themselves on video, so this can be a good way to make some Passport holders feel involved. Some Passport holders will be able to take an active role in designing and making their own video, as well as 'performing' in it, so this is an excellent way to increase personal engagement in the whole process.
4. Several people can view a video at one time, so it can be very useful in, for example, a staff induction or training session, especially paused, discussed, replayed, etc.
5. Video can be the best medium to show 'communication in action' - there are key elements of communication that cannot easily be described but which show up clearly on video, e.g. body language, facial expression, tone of voice, eye movements. Also details of how a child accesses a communication aid, e.g. eye pointing, details of switch positioning, etc. Similarly, techniques used by a communication partner do not go easily into words but can be captured on video, such as:

- Expectant looking, pauses;
- Joint attention & shared looking;
- Physical cues and prompts;
- How long to wait in silence, to encourage the person to initiate communication or to respond (In Passport-speak - **"Don't rush me! - you'll need to be patient and wait for at least 20 seconds before I get into gear to speak to you."**).

A video of a person communicating 'at their best' (e.g. with a symbol book or communication aid) provides a model/example for other communication partners to emulate, a training aid for staff, and a valuable 'benchmark' against which outcomes can be measured and progress over time can be evaluated.

## **Good Practice Guidelines for Video**

Video should be:

- Short (10-20 minutes is best)
- Selective (avoid 'my holiday diary' - that is NOT a Passport). Stick to information relating to communicative interaction, and/or with clients with physical disabilities, positioning and movement. Or
- As with use of photos, plan and decide what you want to show (and why), then video it - don't just video 'everything' or 'general scenes'

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In particular situations, special kinds of video may be used. For example:

### **Edited video**

A reasonably good quality edited video can be a powerful form of positive PR, to 'introduce' a person with disabilities to a new setting. However, such a video would tend not to include many specific practical details.

### **Annotated Video**

A hybrid 'cheap and cheerful' format that can be very useful to get around the problem of not having the money/equipment, time or specialist skills to edit video material, is that of the annotated video. By this is meant 'ordinary' unedited video material but accompanied by detailed notes, to be read along with viewing the video. For example, where a child communicates by using whole body and facial movements, vocalisations etc., a short clip of video which would be otherwise hard to make sense of, could be accompanied by a sheet containing second-by-second points of reference and notes such as:

If you are able to use digital video, a 'commentary' note can be added frame by frame in the form of a 'title'. For example:

**14-22 secs. - Charlie is making 'the face' - whenever you see his lips start to go out like this, you know he is NOT PLEASED and will probably soon start to yell.**

**23-29 secs. - Yup, he's yelling. You can't miss this signal**

**30 - 36 secs. - Staff member John tries to 'distract and divert' him with rustling paper and tinkling noises - note how Charlie 'stills' totally, this means he is listening and getting interested.**

### **Video Clips and Stills**

Rather than a long piece of video, edited digital video can be used very

effectively, with short clips to illustrate particular points.

These can then be used in a variety of ways that are, arguably, more useful than 'straight video', for example:

- Frames from digital video can be saved as 'stills' (usually in .jpg format) and then used - ideally annotated - as photographs, e.g. in a Passport or a 'talking / multimedia Passport', on computer.
- Digital video can be saved in '**QuickTime**' format and can then be emailed to people, or run from inside another application, e.g. a **PowerPoint** presentation.

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Extract (Edited/Updated 2008) from  
Millar, S. (2003) **Personal Communication Passports: Guidelines for Good Practice** Publ. CALL Centre, University of Edinburgh

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