

Personal Communication Passports as a way of consulting and representing children with communication disabilities, to ensure consistent care

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Communication difficulties in children may be easily identified because they are accompanied by physical or sensory disabilities, or second language learning issues, while others are more 'invisible' (eg. delayed/ disordered speech and language development, language comprehension difficulties, dyspraxia, dyslexia, social interaction difficulties etc). All have profound effects on learning and education, self-esteem and personal / social relationships. Communication disabilities and their implications can easily be missed in children in disrupted circumstances.

Personal Communication Passports

Personal Communication Passports provide a practical and child-centred approach to passing on key information (rather than it being locked away in a cabinet in 'confidential records'). A Passport is a way of supporting a vulnerable young person with communication difficulties across transitions, drawing together complex information (including the child's own views, as much as possible) and distilling it into a clear, positive and accessible format. This helps staff and conversation partners to get to know the child with communication disabilities and to interact/respond consistently in order to help the child make sense of events and to 'get the best' out of what communication abilities they do have. A Passport is a vital tool in 'joined-up' inter-agency planning and working, partnership with families, and is an excellent way of implementing and recording consultation with and participation of the young person. Passports aim to support children with complex communication difficulties who cannot easily speak for themselves, by:

- presenting them positively as individuals, not as a set of 'problems' or disabilities
- drawing together information from past and present, from many people who know the child, and from different contexts
- describing the child's most effective means of communication
- presenting information in an attractive easy to understand way
- describing the child's most effective means of communication, so that others can be better communication partners

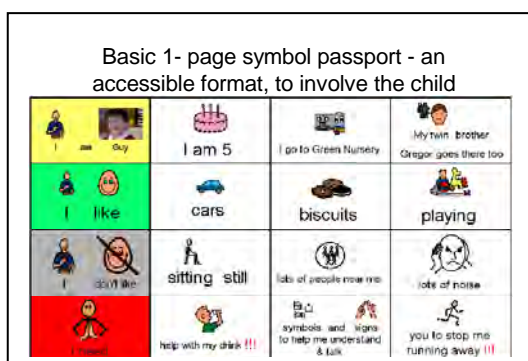
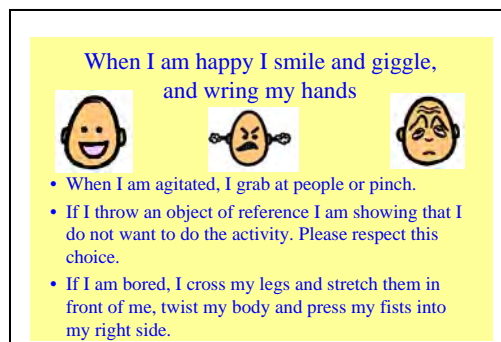
Passport booklets (or cards, folding pockets, wall charts etc) present information about the child in an accessible way that assumes no prior knowledge and is simple, clear, direct, honest, specific and detailed (and - hopefully - fun). Passports are a special way of sorting information. They don't contain ALL the information about a child but a synthesis of KEY information to help other people to help the child to 'be the best he/she can be', on a day-to-day basis.

The Passport belongs to *the child* - not to staff or family (though they may help him or her to use it appropriately, and update it). Passports are especially important at times of transition, when new people come into the child's life and information may not be passed on. They are also helpful when new or temporary staff or volunteers meet the child, helping them quickly to acquire key information, or for, e. introducing a child to a new foster family. The process of creating a Passport can help in the process of assessing children and their needs (and in identifying gaps in assessment).



Evaluation at Sense Scotland

At Sense Scotland, Passports were found to be valuable in many service settings: residential short breaks (respite); holidays; summer activities; day activities and support. Residential Care and Support Staff are often young and inexperienced in specialist work with children with communication difficulties and complex support needs. There can be a comparatively high turnover of staff. There are both high demands on staff and little time for staff training (once the mandatory sessions (eg. on moving and assisting; epilepsy awareness / administration of medication; child protection, first aid, CALM etc.) are delivered). On an evaluation exercise, Passports scored more highly with both parents and staff than 'traditional' information collection and record keeping methods, on: effectiveness, accuracy of information, and personalisation. Passports were agreed to be the preferred method of recording child information.



Passports should not be just a list of likes and dislikes, or a photo album of people and activities. They should include more powerful information about communication, e.g. 'How to TELL when I'm showing you what I like and dislike'; 'How to help me make my own choices'.



Passports can show the details of how to use a child's

communication system, as opposed to simply "Jan uses a communication book."

- **I need lots of time to work out what my eyes are seeing – one thing at a time works best.**
- **I see objects but I can't make sense of pictures, photos or symbols.**
- **You need to think very carefully about where I sit. I am distracted by lots of things, especially by people's faces or by bright light(eg from the window).**
- **Please make sure that the background on which you show me things is uncluttered and contrasts well.**

With regard to vision - rather than having lots of information about visual acuity scores, visual field and contrast scores, documented in report which staff often to not understand, a Passport can record what you need to know to work with the child.

Passports as a tool for consulting

Passports can be very useful when seeking the views of a child with complex communication support needs (and in recording those views so they are not 'lost'). They help by giving guidance to others about, for example, the best way of asking questions in the right way; or giving information to help others understand how the child feels – whether happy or not. A template

for a Consulting Passport is one of the resources to be found on the Listening to Children 2004 CD (Aitken S & Millar S, 2004). More information about Communication Passports (including templates) and 'Listening to Children' can be found on www.callcentrescotland.org.uk

References

Aitken S & Millar S (2004), Listening to Children 2004, Sense Scotland, Glasgow ISBN 1 898042 26 8

Millar S & Aitken S (2003), Personal Communication Passports: Guidelines for good practice, CALL Centre, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh ISBN 1 898042 21 1