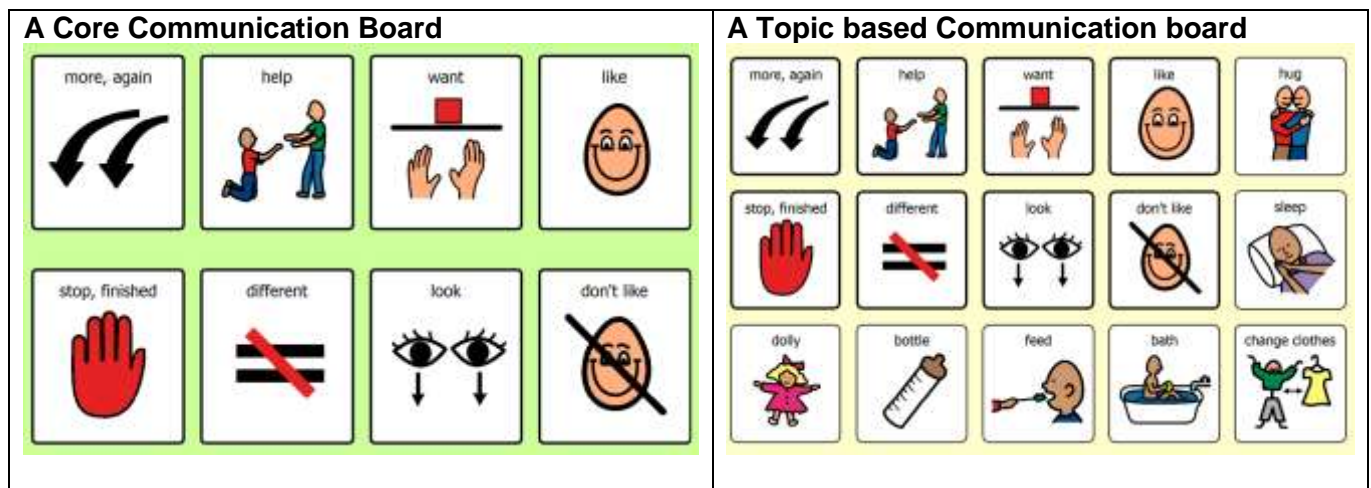


Communication Boards

What are communication boards?

Communication boards are a type of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). AAC can be used for children that are not yet able to use their talking or to support children that need some help with developing their functional communication.

Communication Boards may also be known as symbol boards, commenting boards or communication charts. They are a single sheet with symbols organised on them. They may be specific to a topic or purely consist of core vocabulary. Communication boards can contain anywhere from 2 symbols up to more than 30 symbol on one page.



Who uses communication boards?

Communication boards are usually recommended for children that benefit from the use of picture or symbol support to support their communication and language skills. Some children may already be using words to communicate whereas others may not yet be using any spoken language. Communication boards can also be used for children who have unintelligible speech and therefore need some picture or symbol support to help them to be able to communicate their message more effectively.

Communication boards do not stop a child from developing and using their talking.

How to use communication boards?

- When using a communication board, it's important that adults working with the child make sure that there are suitable boards available. If you don't have a topic specific one, core boards are intended to be used across any activity or situation.
- Start off using communication boards in activities that are motivating and interesting for a child for example, book reading, bubbles, blocks or water play.
- The best way to support a child with communication boards is to use it yourself (As the adult) as much as possible.



- Point to the symbols as you are talking; for example, if you say 'look' point to the 'look' symbol.
- Don't be tempted to move your child's hand to touch the symbols, it can take a lot of modelling from an adult before a child learns to use the board themselves.
- When you are talking remember to point to core words and topic words. Core words are powerful because they can change the meaning of other words. Core words include; more, help, want, stop & look). For example, if you take the word 'dolly', you could be modelling 'more dolly', 'help dolly', 'want dolly', 'dolly stop' or 'look dolly'.
- It's important for adults to talk naturally alongside using communication boards, you don't have to restrict what you say to the symbols on the board. For example, instead of saying the word 'stop' you could say 'finished'.
- Using communication boards naturally slows down the adult talking and this is beneficial for the children using the communication board too.
- If a child points to one picture, the adult should say the word and then add one symbol on (this is the same as you would do if a child said a word).
- Make sure that you **pause** as you use the boards to give the child the opportunity the time to respond. This is unlikely to be immediately so make sure that you leave 10seconds of silence to see if they do respond.
- Don't insist on the child using their talking! If they have pointed to a symbol, they have successfully communicated their message and the adult should respond as if the child has communicated using their talking.

Top Tips

- Adults will need to **model** the use of communication boards to support the child to learn the purpose of it. If you were supporting a child to learn to talk, you wouldn't expect them to pick up words without being spoken to. This is exactly the same with any form of AAC.
- Remember to model lots of different functions of communication (or reasons for communicating) using the core words below to add to the topic word
 - Asking questions you want
 - Giving instructions you stop
 - Requesting I want/ want more
 - Commenting I see
 - Refusing: stop/ no
 - Requesting for help more help/ want help
 - Gaining attention wow look
- Make sure that communication boards are used with different people in different places. They should be used at school or nursery and home. They should be used in the house, in the garden and when you go out! A core communication board can be used in any activity or situation so is a good one to carry around with you!
- It's okay for other children to use the communication boards with the child so encourage them explore them and use them with their peers. This can open up communication opportunities'.

Other Useful Resources

- Who's Afraid of AAC? The UK Guide to Augmentative and Alternative Communication by Alison Battye
- There are some freely available communication boards on the ACE Centre website which can be downloaded and printed <https://acecentre.org.uk/resources>
- Smartbox <https://thinksmartbox.com/simple-aac/>

You might also like to view advice sheets on '*Total Communication Approach*'.

