Total Communication

"Total Communication" is an approach which encourages the use of many different communication techniques to support someone's understanding and use of language.

Examples of Total Communication are:

- Signing
- Gestures, body language and facial expression
- Symbols, photographs or objects of reference
- Music to aid transitions

Total Communication is encouraged for anyone who has speech, language and communication needs. As communication partners, we can support them by using the above methods, in addition to speech.

"Total Communication" at Sladewood Academy

AAC

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is a range of tools to help people who have difficulties with speech. They may be non-speaking, minimally speaking, or simply need a visual support to prompt. AAC can come in many forms, such as objects of reference, paper-based symbols and communication boards, or high-tech systems. AAC helps someone to communicate as effectively as possible, in as many situations as possible.

Different types of AAC

At Sladewood Academy we have a Total Communication environment, meaning all forms of communication are encouraged, supported and accepted.

This document will highlight how we conduct Total Communication both in lessons and across the school day.

If you have any questions about Total Communication at Sladewood, or would like further support, please contact Speech & Language Therapist, Amy Craig.

Thank you for reading!

MEANS, REASONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Means, Reasons & Opportunities Model

Means
(how we communicate)
Speech
Signs
Symbols
Gestures
Body language
Facial expression
Pointing
Objects & pictures

Opportunities
(where, when and with whom we communicate)
Partner
Time & place
Shared language
Shared communication system
Shared interest

Reasons
(why we communicate)
Attention
Greetings
Wants/needs
Request information
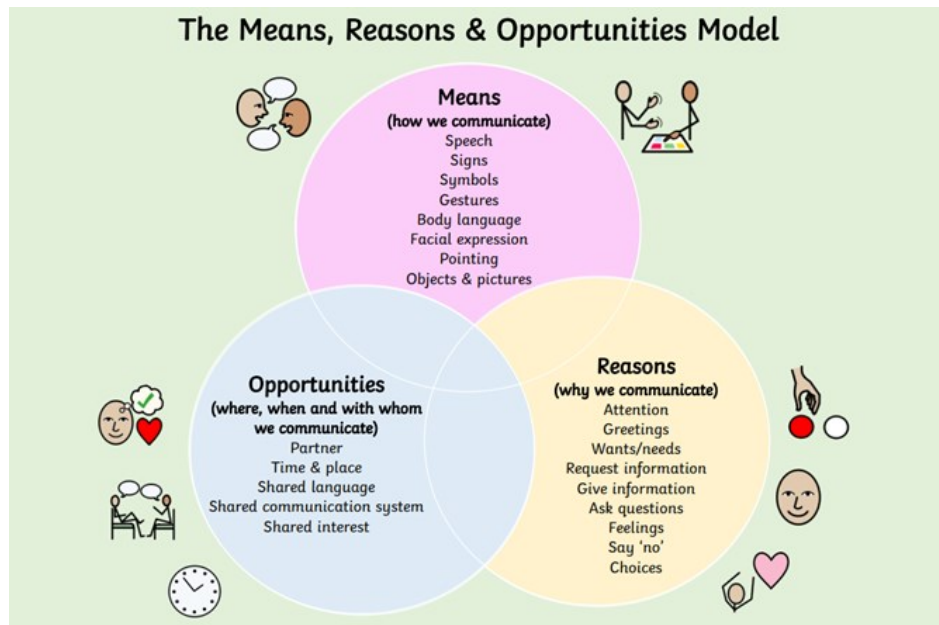Give information
Ask questions
Feelings
Say 'no'
Choices

Diagram of the Means, Reasons and Opportunities model

The above model highlights the importance of support within three different areas in order for pupils to reach their full communication potential.

- Means – how a person communicates. At Sladewood, we introduce, model and encourage many forms of communication, focusing on a person's strengths and interests.

- Reasons – encouraging reasons for a person to communicate. At Sladewood, we provide opportunities and reasons for children to communicate, during both lessons and social times.

- Opportunities – where, when and with whom a person communicates. At Sladewood, we encourage communication across the school day, with trained communication partners, in a variety of situations.

MAKATON SIGNING

Makaton signing is embedded into all aspects of learning, play and development at Sladewood.

As part of the induction process, staff are introduced to our own Core Vocabulary signs. We are privileged to have all staff trained in Level 1 Makaton. Twelve staff members are also trained in Level 2 Makaton.

To further learning, six "Signs of the Week" are taught to all staff and pupils every week, via direct teaching in a "Signing Briefing" and a corresponding document. These signs are sent home to parents via Class Dojo and usually relate to current events, such as a school trip. Subject Makaton folders further support the delivery of core words during specific lessons.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION BOARDS

At Sladewood, we have large communication boards placed in key areas around the school site, including; reception, sensory room, library, hygiene room, soft play and hall. We are in the process of developing boards for our outside areas, such as the EYFS garden and our new "Nature Camp".

Staff model the use of these boards by pointing to symbols as they communicate with pupils. From this, pupils have been spontaneously using these board to express their wants and needs.

The visuals themselves also act as a reminder that we are a Total Communication school and we have an inclusive communication and learning environment.

An environmental communication board example

LESSON VISUALS

As part of our Group Time lesson approach, the expectation is for all lessons is to use topic specific visuals and communication boards alongside the activity. This supports pupils to fully understand and learn new vocabulary, as well as providing an opportunity for them to use these communication boards within the lesson themselves.

All classes are also provided with communication boards for snack time and activities in play.

Visuals being used in Mice Class

GRIDPLAYER

At Sladewood, all large classroom screens have access to Gridplayer and are used to support communication and learning across the day. Several class iPads also have Gridplayer, which classes can use to trial high-tech AAC with individual pupils.

The staff team have received training direct from Smartbox.

Gridplayer on an iPad and large classroom screen (Smartbox website)

TRANSITIONS

Visuals are used to support transitions.

Daily timetables are consistently used throughout the day. All classes also use a PowerPoint (right) to show what they are currently learning. Transition music is played as an additional prompt when it is time to change activity.

All staff wear a symbol lanyard to support verbal instructions. Some pupils also benefit from being shown objects, e.g. a plate for 'lunch time', therefore several objects of reference can be found around the school site.
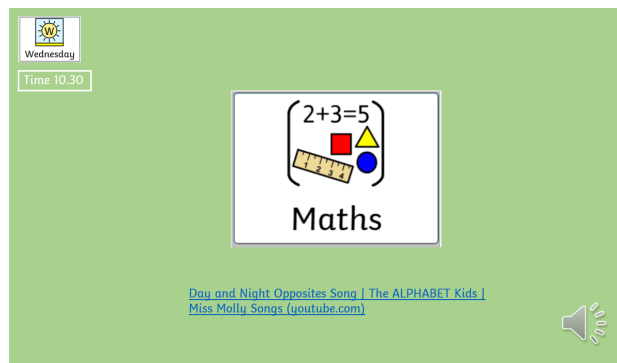
Transition PowerPoint

CONSISTENCY!

A "Symbol Policy and Communication Friendly Environment" document helps to ensure the consistency of visuals across different classrooms and around the school site. This helps during the transition period to new classes in September. Colourful Semantics colours are used on many of our documents, to further support language development.