



# Communication at Watermill School



## What is communication?

Communication is exchanging information from one person to another.

Effective communication involves one person giving relevant information most commonly through words (spoken or written), facial expressions and body language, and a second person receiving and understanding the exchange.

To effectively communicate, we must recognise that we are all different in the way that we perceive the world and use this understanding to help us with our communication with others. Communication itself involves far more than speech alone. Whilst verbalisation is valuable, communication is far more than just being able to talk.



## How Communication begins to develop.

Babies begin to develop their communication skills from birth, learning first to cry to alert parents of their needs or to gain the attention of adults.

This then progresses with eye contact and expressions; children begin to respond to sounds and familiar noises or react to the sound of their name.

Following this, children then develop movement and begin to point, gesture and wave. Finally, children start to develop speech, repeating simple words and gradually increasing vocabulary from around one year old.



Parents learn to interpret the wants and needs of young children long before speech develops by recognising sounds and observing cues from the child, such as pointing, gesturing, or leading by the hand to a particular place or thing.



## Barriers to communication.

All children progress at their own pace and every child is unique in their development. Barriers to communication can arise at any stage of growth. The most common barriers are:

- Lack of speech development - inability to verbalise or limited vocabulary
- Unable to read - poor comprehension/understanding of written text
- English is the child's second language
- Physical development - poor motor skills or coordination
- Social development - unable to recognise cues, interpret gestures
- Regional dialect and colloquialisms



## Interventions to support communication.

At Watermill, we combine a range of alternative methods alongside speech to support inclusive communication for the entire school community. We feel it is vital to a healthy, social, emotional, and academic development for all our students to feel valued, understood and to be able to interact effectively with all peers and staff.

Whilst working closely with outside agencies including speech and language therapists, we also engage with Makaton, Picture Aided Communication (PAC), Inprint3, modern technologies and the 'See and learn' programs in Literacy to encourage vocabulary and reading development.



## Makaton

### What is Makaton?

Makaton is a language programme that uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people to communicate. It supports the development of essential communication skills such as attention and listening, comprehension, memory, recall and organisation of language and expression.



### The benefits of using Makaton with your child.

The link below explains the benefits of using Makaton as a form of communication. The video is called 'CBeebies Grown-ups: The Benefits of Makaton for your child'.

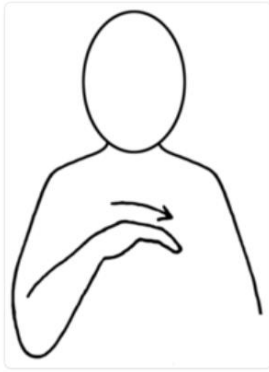
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=143&v=tRiW0s7wWIc&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=143&v=tRiW0s7wWIc&feature=emb_title)

Some of the benefits of Makaton covered in the video are:

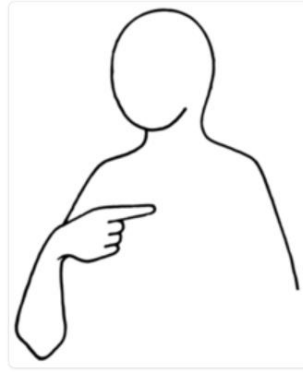
- Children's confidence will increase as they can communicate with others around them.
- Children's frustrations will decrease as they realise, they can express what they want and they are able to tell others around them.
- Using signs can enhance and promote speech development.



Some signs you could use at home



Home



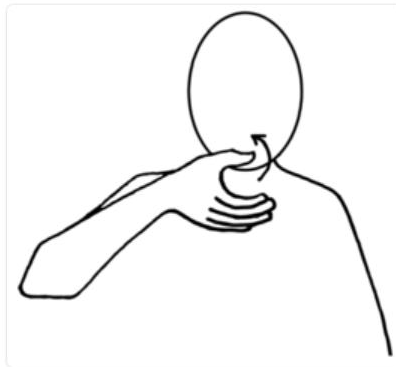
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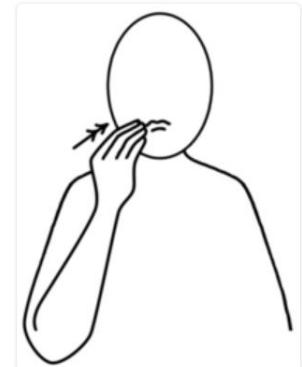
Mum/Mummy/Mother



Dad/Daddy



To Drink



To eat



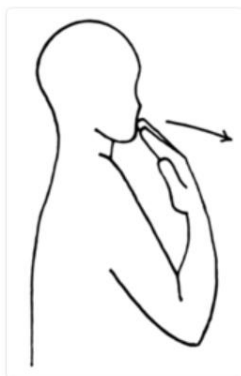
Toilet



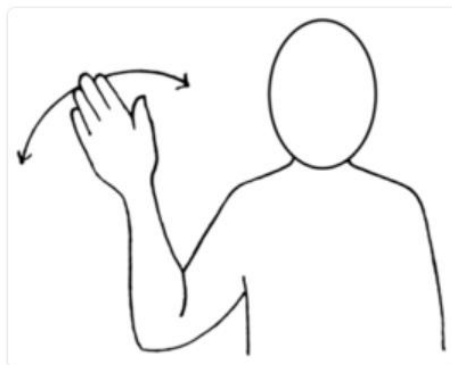
More



Please



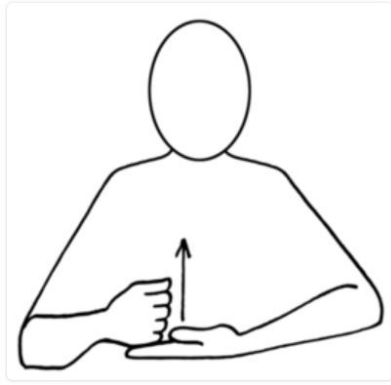
Thankyou



Goodbye



Hello



Help



Pain

To sign pain/hurt shake your hand in the area that is hurting. For example, if it is tummy ache, shake hand at the tummy, if tooth ache, shake hand in front of mouth etc.

Some useful web links to use to introduce and practice Makaton

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/shows/something-special>

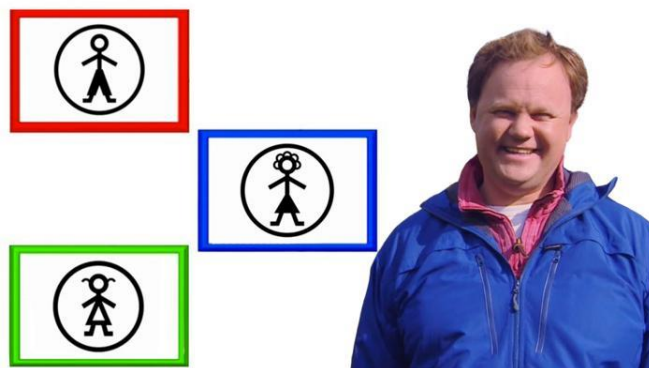
This website is full of fun games and activities for children to interact with and practice their Makaton.

<https://www.youtube.com/c/SingingHandsUK>

This YouTube channel is filled with lots of familiar songs that are sung alongside Makaton for your children to sing and sign along with.

[https://makaton.org/TMC/The\\_Makaton\\_community/Sign\\_of\\_the\\_Week.aspx](https://makaton.org/TMC/The_Makaton_community/Sign_of_the_Week.aspx)

The Makaton website has got lots of useful resources, including a "sign of the week" for children to learn and practice with helpful video demonstrations.

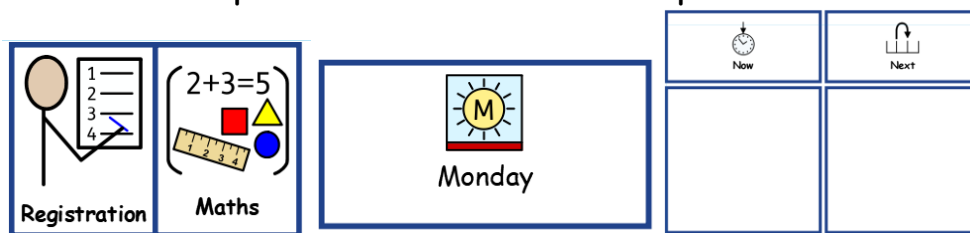


## In Print

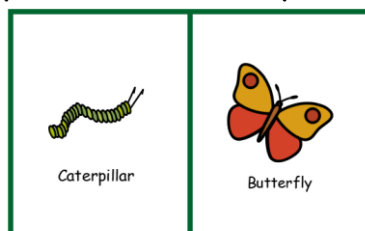
InPrint is a program used for creating symbol-supported resources for users of all ages and abilities. The symbols are simple, colourful and each illustrate a single concept in a clear and concise way. The symbols are used to create signs, labels, flashcards, timetables, worksheets and much more across the school. These can be used at school, home and in the community to provide an opportunity to share vocabulary and offer a method of communication.

At Watermill, we use different coloured borders to differentiate the purpose of the symbols:

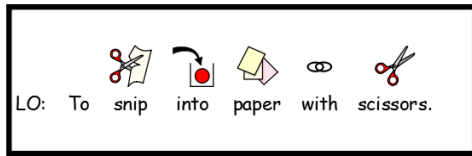
- **Blue** – Daily timetable, days, months, etc. and now and next boards to help with transition and independence.



- **Green** – These are used for vocabulary and are often used alongside objects of reference during a sensory story or other practical activity or lesson.



- **Black** - These are used on displays throughout the school environment. This includes learning objectives, hygiene symbols and labelling around the school to help children to navigate the environment or to find resources.



- **Red** - These are symbols relating to warnings of danger or specific behaviour targets - Stop/Do not touch, etc.



- **No border** - These symbols are used for PECs or lanyards.



### How do we know that InPrint is effective in supporting the children at Watermill?

Some examples of where our communication system has helped children to thrive:

- **Harley** - Using our communication system has helped him to navigate and organise the order of his lessons and to clearly understand what we expect of him during the day. It has also helped with his mindfulness, keeping him calmer and helping to regulate his emotions.
- **Faisal** - When Faisal first joined Watermill, he knew very little English and introducing vocabulary to him using symbols alongside speech has meant that his understanding has developed immensely as has his confidence to communicate with independence.



## How can parents support?

It is important for children to practice communicating using symbols in different environments. Having and encouraging the use of symbols at home will allow you and your child to communicate more effectively. We can support parents to practice with their child by providing symbols for use at home, particularly relating to specific things or difficulties, e.g. morning or bedtime routines, symbols to prepare for an upcoming hospital appointment etc.



InPrint symbols can be used as a part of Picture Aided Communication (PAC) to enable children to communicate with others.

## Picture Aided Communication (PAC)

### What is the Picture Aided Communication (PAC)?

Picture Aided Communication, or PAC, allows children and young people with limited or no speech to communicate using picture symbols.



PAC can be invaluable in teaching a child how to initiate communication with another person. The child first learns to request highly desirable items and then expands this to support commenting and sentence formulation. The child is taught to make their requests by handing a picture symbol representing what they want, to an adult who is holding the desired item. PAC is taught in eighteen stages. Some will master each phase quite quickly, while others may not fully achieve Stage 6.

### The Stages of Picture Aided Communication

#### **Stage 1 - Exploring and recognising picture symbols**

Pupils are introduced to picture symbols that are of high interest to them, e.g. food items that they like at snack time, sensory items, things that they need, using objects of reference to support.

#### **Stage 2 - Communicating using single symbols**

Pupils will learn to tap an individual picture symbol when shown a corresponding object of reference, e.g. touching the toast symbol when given a piece of toast at snack time. Pupils will be exposed to the language of choice making, e.g. "toast, Sarah wants toast."

#### **Stage 3 - Making a choice**

Pupils will be presented with two picture symbols, one item of interest and one of no interest, reinforced by objects of reference initially and then gradually remove these. Pupils will be supported and taught to tap on the picture symbol of the item they would like to choose. The language of choice making is further developed by the

adults working with the pupils, reinforced further by the use of Makaton.

#### **Stage 4 - Making difficult choices**

Pupils choice making will be extended - tapping the symbol that they want, from a choice of two desirable items.

#### **Stage 5 - Supported exchange**

Pupil will be taught to exchange an individual picture symbol from a choice of two with an adult, initially with hand over hand support before reducing to verbal prompts.

#### **Stage 6 - Independent exchange**

Pupils will generalise the skills they have learnt and independently exchange their symbol of choice with a range of adults.

#### **Stage 7 - Making choices from a wider range of symbols**

Pupils will be exposed to a gradually increasing number of options to choose from and will be encouraged to make a wider range of choices. (The number of choices is specified in the PAC assessment tool).

#### **Stage 8 - Introducing a sentence strip**

Pupils will be taught to use a sentence strip, adding their symbol of choice to the sentence strip that already has "I want" and "please" in place and exchanging it with an adult.



#### **Stage 9 - I want and please**

Pupils will be taught to add "I want" and "please" along with their symbol of choice to the sentence strip before exchanging.

### **Stage 10 – Travelling to exchange**

Pupils will be taught to move from their position and exchange with an adult, gradually increasing the distance to develop persistence. (Distances are specified in the PAC assessment tool).

### **Stage 11 – Symbols inside the communication book**

All symbols (available choices only) will be stored inside the communication book. Pupils will be taught to open the communication book and look for symbols inside when making their choices.

All of the above stages should then be reinforced and consolidated so that pupils generalise their use of skills learnt, enabling them to make choices in the general environment and during less structured times in addition to structured activities and communication sessions.

### **Stage 12 – Attributes**

Learning to use multiple symbols to describe the object they want, e.g. blue paint

### **Stage 13 – What do you want?**

Pupils will independently create a sentence in response to the question: what do you want?

### **Stage 14 – Sharing my wants**

Pupils will independently share their wants when they decide that they want something (without being asked).

### **Stage 15 – Commenting: What do you see?**

When asked the question What do you see? pupils can create a sentence to describe what they can see, e.g. I see a bird, I see a big ball.

### **Stage 16 – Commenting: What do you hear?**

When asked the question What do you hear? pupils can create a sentence to describe what they can hear, e.g. I hear cars, I hear talking, I hear music.



### **Stage 17 – Commenting: What do you feel?**

When asked the question What do you feel? pupils can create a sentence to describe what they feel, e.g. I feel hot, I feel hungry, I feel something cold/smooth.

### **Stage 18 – Commenting: What is it?**

When asked What is it? pupils can use a wide range of symbols to describe what "it" is. This could be describing an object, a picture, an event etc.

### What are the building blocks necessary to develop PAC?

- Interpersonal interaction: a child must 'want' to communicate with others
- Mobility and controlled movement in the arms and hands
- Motivation: motivated to request items
- Planning and sequencing: the sequential multi-step task/activity performance to achieve a well-defined result

### Advantages of Picture Communication

- The "listener" or the person that is at the receiving end of the exchange does not need special training because pictures are easy to understand and are often labelled.
- Starting with PAC can help avoid creating a negative emotional history related to speech.
- Many individuals start with the ability to point to what they want so there is a high possibility for success.
- Developing confidence and self esteem
- PAC is a fairly inexpensive, low tech language intervention.

### What if my child has problems learning to use PAC?

If a child has difficulties learning PAC they might:

- Not be motivated to request items
- Be resistant to hand-over-hand prompting/guidance.
- Get frustrated when they can't get their message across.
- Struggle to maintain attention to task.

- Be unable to match physical objects to a picture of the item.
- Have difficulties with social skills - they struggle to engage in reciprocal interaction with others (either verbally or non-verbally), to compromise with others, and be able to recognize and follow social norms.

### What can be done to help with these difficulties?

- Motivation: Use items that are highly interesting and motivating so that they will want to request them.
- Aversion: Offer a choice including items that they do not like so that when learning how to discriminate between items they have something that is not appealing to request.
- Decrease sensitivity to touch: Decreasing the child's resistance to being touched or find alternative methods to encourage and support exchange
- Photos/Real objects: Use photos of or real items instead of or alongside the picture symbols so that it is easier for your child to recognise.



### What activities can help improve and develop Picture Aided Communication?

- Putting a desired item/object up high (but still in the child's sight) encourages and motivates the child/young person to make a request.
- Completing only part of an activity or task so that the child has to make a request for it to be completed (e.g. get the bath ready but forget to have the bubbles or their favourite bath toys).
- Only allowing the child or young person to engage for a short period in an activity so that they have to make a request for the activity to continue (e.g. turn on a video or song and then turn it off after a short while).
- Starting to play with a toy or participate in an activity and then wait to see if the child or young person asks for the toy/activity so that they can have a turn.

- During snack or meal times, encourage the child or young person to make a choice about what they would like to eat and drink or the colour cup/plate they would like to use.
- When reading or sharing books, take it in turns to comment about pictures in the story using the picture sentence strip (e.g. I see a car, I see a bird).
- Place a variety of items in a bag/pillow case. Take it in turns to pull out an item and say what you have using the picture sentence strip (e.g. I have a ball).

### Our success stories

- Jade was unable to communicate her choices at snack time at the beginning of this academic year. PAC was introduced and she is now able to find the "teacake" picture symbol from eight other symbols and add it to the sentence strip before exchanging across the table with an adult. She is now developing her ability to exchange by travelling across the room.
- Heidi likes to be outside. At the beginning of the year, after finishing her work she would go to the door and bang on the window. We began with a single symbol on the wall, which she touched and she has now progressed to locating the communication book, finding the "I want", "outside" and "please" symbols, adding these to the sentence strip and finding an adult in the room to exchange the strip with.

### Communication in different pathways

At Watermill we use many strategies to support Communication across the school community, including the use of InPrint symbols for displays and visual timetables. Now and next boards are also used where appropriate to support transitions.

Attention Autism is also a key part of the provision, where appropriate, in many of the pathways and the use of Makaton is being



developed throughout our school to increase inclusivity.

All children, throughout the Primary and Secondary pathways will receive provision and support to develop their communication through whole class provision, small group support or targeted interventions (1:1 or small groups). Within the specialised pathways - Communication, Sensory and EYFS, provision and support for Communication development will look different as it is more targeted towards the specific needs and abilities of the pupils within those pathways.

### What does provision and support look like in specialised pathways?

#### **EYFS**

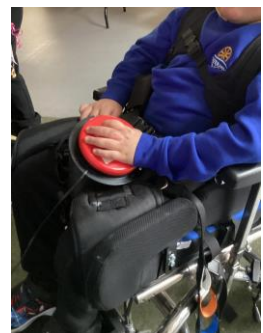
Communication, language and literacy is fundamental within Early Years and children are encouraged and supported to talk, sing, sign and use alternative methods of communication including Makaton, PAC and technology such as talking tins and switches. We provide opportunities for the children to engage with sensory stories and rhymes as well as Attention Autism sessions.

#### **Sensory Pathways (1, 2 and 3)**

The entire curriculum within the Sensory classes is aimed to provide as many sensory experiences as possible, whilst developing engagement, independence and communication. Children are taught how to use alternative methods of communication including objects of reference, Makaton, PAC and technologies such as switches and Eye Gaze.



Alternative therapies are also used as an integral part of the provision, including Rebound Therapy, Tac-Pac, Touch Communication, Sherbourne and Story massage.



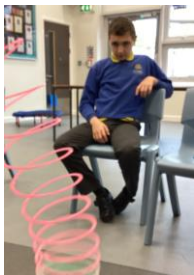


## Communication Pathways (1, 2 and 3)

Communication is an integral element of the curriculum, throughout all teaching, learning and activities within the classes. Picture symbols, Makaton, objects of reference and intensive interactions are used throughout each day and across all areas of learning to provide opportunities for children to develop their understanding of communication as well as their social communication.



The children within this pathway are taught through group and individual tasks and interventions to use alternative methods of communication including Makaton, picture symbols and PAC as well as modern technologies such as switches, voice boxes, "talking" resources" etc. to communicate their wants, needs, knowledge and choices.



The curriculum is designed to provide sensory and creative experiences for the children alongside Attention Autism, Rebound Therapy, Tac-Pac, Touch Communication, Dough Disco and Sherbourne.