

Communication without speech

People with profound and complex learning difficulties use a wide range of highly individualised methods of communication. These can be very subtle, unconventional and difficult for others to read. Staff working with individuals can create an environment which respects, values and shapes these attempts into more standardised communication methods.

A total communication environment can provide opportunities for learners to develop both expressive and receptive skills. In this environment staff can support a wide range of communication modes in order to encourage all types of communication, including:

- reflex reactions, responses to people and activities, such as a gasp or tensing the body
- facial expressions and body movements, such as turning away
- gestures and the use of signs, for example, a Makaton sign for “toilet”
- objects of reference, such as, a tambourine at music time
- photographs, pictures or symbols, such as using a photograph of a drink at break time
- vocalisation, for example making sounds, such as “mmm” or “aaah”
- speaking and listening, for example, following simple instructions
- reading and writing, such as a written name on a coat peg
- information and communication technology, such as a pre-recorded message

[Reflex and pre intentional communication](#)

These ideas are based on the Enhancing Quality of Life Resource Pack, *Byers, R., Dee, L., Hayhoe, H. and Maudslay, L. (2002) Enhancing Quality of Life*. London: Skill and University of which draws upon the experience of practitioners working with people with profound and complex learning difficulties across a range of contexts and in a variety of ways.

See [references](#) for details of how to order this resource.