

Symbols

People with profound and complex difficulties may use symbols to support spoken or written communication. They can be used successfully with individuals who are able to recognise photographs and other two-dimensional images such as pictures or computer graphics.

Commercially produced symbols are readily available and are often linked to signing systems. Symbols are stylised line drawings, some of which are iconic and easily recognisable (such as a drawing of a toilet or cup), others are more abstract (such as the symbol for “on”, which is a line drawing of a black spot on top of a square) others are more culturally specific (such as a drawing of a house with a door, window and chimney).

Some individuals can make use of symbols through information and [communications technology to communicate](#). Other individuals can use tactile or raised symbols. However, staff should remember that symbols are abstract and not appropriate for everyone.

“Mandip has a small collection of laminated symbol cards attached to his belt on a key ring. Staff use the symbols to prompt him when it is time to attend to his personal hygiene needs or when it is time for him to move to a new situation. Mandip can also use the symbols himself, showing a particular card to a member of staff in order to request a change of activity or to ask for his personal needs to be met.”
Enhancing the Quality of Life

Use of objects of reference and symbols for labelling in the environment is illustrated in the link:

[Labelling the environment](#)

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 Cambridge 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.