

Assessment to Determine Candidacy for Using Facilitated Communication

In order for facilitated communication training to be considered and successfully implemented, two things must occur: an individual needs to be identified as a candidate and those who support that individual need to show commitment to the training process. ***Both of these elements begin with the assessment.***

The goal of assessment in facilitated communication training is to determine the benefit of facilitated communication for an individual, and, if applicable, give recommendations concerning the specific use of the method with that candidate. In determining the benefit of facilitated communication training for an individual, the following should be taken into consideration:

- current communication strategies,
- current and past use of AAC strategies,
- independent pointing skills,
- history and current description of movement problems,
- current and past use of support strategies across the person's range of social contexts.

In cases where other AAC strategies have been effective, facilitated communication training may be considered as an additional benefit. In cases where current communication strategies are ineffective and AAC strategies have not been tried, facilitated communication training may be recommended on the basis of significant and specific movement problems. It is important to note that facilitated communication training is not seen as a substitute for AAC approaches, but rather as a way of effectively and rapidly gaining access to a wider range of AAC than might otherwise be possible.

Minimally, people are considered candidates if they have no speech or their speech is limited, erratic or inconsistent; and if their ability to point independently is not consistently reliable. It is not necessary that the person demonstrate literacy skills in the assessment in order to be considered a candidate. The assessment should carefully consider what has been tried, and what has been effective. It should compare independent skills with facilitated skills and have a rationale for the need for support through facilitation by the potential candidate. It should also consider the effectiveness of other support strategies such as structuring communicative interactions, making environmental accommodations, and using routines and scripts.

If it is determined that facilitated communication training would benefit an individual, recommendations should be given through the assessment that helps develop the person's initial use of facilitated communication. Recommendations should include

- specific support strategies for dealing with hand function issues (e.g., the amount of resistance and pull back needed)
- specific support strategies for general movement issues (e.g., support for trunk positioning and eye gaze)
- minimum effective level of physical support (i.e., degree of fading achieved while allowing for reasonably accurate pointing)
- optimal positioning of the candidate and the device relative to each other
- description of observed literacy skills
- device options, with recommendations addressing both short-range and longer-range access issues

- other supports necessary for successful communication (e.g., the commitment of the support team to create a positive environment, give consistent access, and allow time to practice)
- strategies that would enable the user to focus his or her attention on the task at hand
- plans for a continuing training process, including scheduling designed to optimize opportunities for effective practice for the candidate and his or her facilitators.

If a person is thought to be a candidate for facilitated communication training, he or she should be properly assessed by an experienced facilitator who has been trained to do assessments. An assessment for the use of facilitated communication should preferably be done by a communication therapist with extensive experience in facilitated communication.