

COMMUNICATION PLAN GUIDELINES FOR INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES

A Communication Plan is an essential part of a person's individual support plan. The purpose of a Communication Plan is to describe all the methods that a person uses to communicate. These guidelines are meant to provide a framework for developing meaningful and effective communication plans. The complexity of the Plan depends on the types of support the person needs. It can be brief if the person just needs an accommodation, such as an interpreter. It can be more detailed if, for example, the person has a complex electronic device used for communication.

Communication can happen using different methods in different settings. Examples of settings are home, work, community, or school. Communication can change depending on who the person is speaking with or how they are feeling. The Plan should describe the supports that people need to communicate well.

For example:

- Tips that make it easier for a person to communicate.
- Skills training for the person and their communication partners.
- Technology like a tablet or smartphone.

1. A Communication Plan helps ensure a person can communicate in a variety of situations.

- Familiar communication partners will know how to support a person's communication.
- New partners will learn how a person communicates.
- New teams for a person will have information on how a person communicates.
- Information about the way a person communicates will be available in medical settings like hospitals, crisis situations or when getting respite.
- Information about a person's communication will be organized and understandable to others.

2. Anyone who has communication support needs must have a Communication Plan.

The complexity of the Plan can vary from person to person depending on their communication needs. A Plan may be used for people who:

- Do not speak English and need an interpreter for translation.
- Can speak but are not able to speak clearly enough to be understood by others.
- Can speak but sometimes find it easier to communicate by using a device.
- Use sign language and need an interpreter to communicate with people who do not sign.
- Do not speak and use gestures, facial expressions, and body actions.
- Do not speak and use an electronic device such as tablet to communicate.

3. The Core Components of a Communication Plan

Description of the different methods that a person uses to communicate. This description identifies which method a person prefers and uses most of the time. It would also identify which methods work best in specific places or situations. For example:

- In a restaurant, the person uses their communication device to speak their order. The server in the restaurant will then be able to understand what the person orders. When the person is at home, they sign what they want to eat because their housemates understand their sign language.

Description of the devices and techniques used for specific methods of communication. For example:

- The person uses a tablet with a communication app. There are several different apps for tablets. A person taps a picture on the screen to speak their message.
- The person uses a method called supported typing. They use a keyboard to spell out what they want to say. They get physical support on their arm when they are typing. This support makes it easier for them to type what they want to say.
- The person uses a method called eye gaze to communicate. They use their eyes to choose letters, words, or pictures on the screen of a device. The device will speak their message.
- The person uses a switch to control their communication device. A switch is for people who have difficulty with the touch screen, mouse, or keyboard.

- A mouse button, keyboard keys, or special buttons are types of switches. The person pushes down on a large red button with their hand to control their device.
- The person uses a communication book. The book has pages that have words and pictures for things in their everyday life. They point to the words and pictures to communicate their message.

4. A Communication Plan Works Best when it Includes:

- The person's own ideas about the supports they need for communication.
- A document called a [Communication Dictionary](#). A communication dictionary explains three different things about a person's communication:
 1. What a person does to communicate. This could be facial expressions, gestures, body movements, or words.
 2. It tells others what each of these things mean.
 3. It tells others how they should respond.
- The strategies that communication partners use to support the person to communicate. Examples of strategies a communication partner might use are:
 - Encouraging the person to speak up.
 - Being patient and giving the person extra time to communicate.
 - Reminding the person to look at their communication board before making a choice on the board.
 - Helping a person set up their communication device.
- Essential information about a person's communication device. This information can be put on the [Technology Form](#). Examples of information can include:
 - Security information like passwords.
 - Directions on how to use the device or app.
 - Directions on how to charge, program, and take care of the device.
 - Contact information to get technical support for devices or apps.
- Video clip of the person communicating in an everyday situation. The video would show how a familiar partner supports the person in that situation.

5. Tips on How to Write a Communication Plan

- Use person-centered language.
- Use plain language that is accessible and understood by many people.
- Use sentences that are clear and concise.

- Use writing that is based on facts and not opinions.
- Use language that is descriptive and specific and use many examples.
- Use positive language that shows that the person can and wants to communicate.

6. How to Share a Communication Plan

- The Communication Plan should be available both digitally and in hard copy. This means having printed copies of the Plan and supplemental information available to people who communicate with the person. It is important to train people on the Plan and share it with others, especially when the person has a change in their life, such as:
 - Getting a different job.
 - Getting services from a different agency.
 - Moving to a different home.
 - Staying at a hospital.
 - Going to respite or an emergency placement.
- Examples of others to share the Plan with may include:
 - Service coordinators.
 - Shared living providers.
 - Community support workers
 - Respite workers.
 - Doctors and other medical professionals.
 - Employment program staff and coworkers.
 - Crisis service staff.
 - Other direct support professionals.
 - Family and friends.

Click here for fillable [*Communication Plan Form*](#).

Resources

Supplemental information and resources regarding communication supports:

- [*How to Write Communication Plans Training*](#)
- [*Communication Planning Checklist*](#)
- [*Communication Dictionary*](#)
- [*Communication Technology Information Form*](#)
- [*Vermont Communication Task Force Website*](#)