

**INFORMATION ON
FACILITATED COMMUNICATION TRAINING
IN VERMONT
2016**

- Facilitated communication (FC) is one method of augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) that has been used successfully by a number of different people with limited speech in Vermont over the past 25 years. Along with other methods of communication, the use of FC has enabled people to make choices and decisions in their lives and participate more fully in school, work and community life. Through the use of best practices and comprehensive training, Vermont has been a leader on a national level in supporting people who use this method of communication.
- Facilitated communication (FC) is supported as part of a total communication approach where an individual may use several different methods of communication and receive training and support in those different methods. The decision to use FC should be based on careful assessment and should be integrated with other methods of communication. When making recommendations about the use of FC for a particular individual, it is important to incorporate these into a general communication plan for that individual.
- Facilitated communication (FC) is described as being a strategy that can help people to develop the skills necessary to access communication boards and devices independently and to communicate effectively. Our efforts in supporting facilitated communication (FC) in Vermont have focused on providing training and technical assistance to ensure that both communicators and their facilitators learn the necessary skills required for the technique to be used appropriately and successfully. We do not endorse the use of FC by people who have not received the necessary training and oversight. This training needs to be intensive and ongoing. We strongly advise that new facilitators work under the supervision of an experienced facilitator.
- Since 1994, Vermont has been actively involved in the establishment of best practice guidelines for the use of FC. In 2000, several members of the Vermont Communication

Task Force participated on a national task force that developed the [Facilitated Communication Training Standards](#) . The purpose of these standards was to establish a uniform and comprehensive set of practice guidelines that would guide people in the use of FC. The task force was composed of educators, speech language pathologists, university researchers, human service professionals, and family members and individuals who use FC from around the country. These training standards provide guidance on best practices, facilitator competency, FC user skill development, technical assistance, and training models.

- We make every effort to stay abreast of new information and research on FC. While there have been a number studies with negative results which discount FC as a valid method of communication, there are also a number of studies that have demonstrated positive results in terms of the validity of FC. These studies have looked at FC from a variety of perspectives and incorporate different research designs, providing a more comprehensive picture of the communication process when FC is being used. A summary of these studies include:
 - Message passing (Cardinal, Hanson, & Wakeham 1996; Sheehan & Matuozzi 1996; Weiss, Wagner & Bauman 1996). Each of these message passing studies where individuals demonstrated authorship involved multiple sessions, with the possible effect of allowing participants to be desensitized to anxiety over the course of the study.
 - Video eye-tracking of the facilitated communication users' eye gaze to verify that individual letters, or series' of letters, were targeted by the individual before ever making the first move of the hand toward a target (Grayson, Emerson, Howard-Jones & O'Neil 2011)
 - Linguistic analysis of individuals' typing, demonstrating that the individuals with disabilities employ significantly different patterns of word use and sentence construction than their facilitators, and that they were different from each other even when they shared the same facilitator (Zanobini and Scopese 2001; Niemi & Karna-Lin 2002; Tuzzi 2009)
 - Evidence of speech before and during typing (Broderick & Kasa-Hendrickson, 2001; Kasa-Hendrickson & Broderick, 2009)

[Institute on Communication and Inclusion Research Statement 2010](#)

- We recognize that there is considerable disagreement in the professional community about the use of FC and research. We know that national professional organizations have taken positions on the use of FC. In Vermont, we have chosen to follow the guidelines of TASH (the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps) that were developed for augmentative communication and facilitated communication, TASH first developed this resolution in 1992 and revised the [TASH Resolution on the Right to Communicate](#) most recently in 2016. TASH views access to all forms of alternative communication including FC as a basic individual right. However, they strongly encourage the “careful, reflective use of facilitated communication” and emphasize the importance of training and new research.

- We agree that it is important for individuals using FC to demonstrate that they are the authors of their communication. Through the use of a communication portfolio, instances where an individual validates their communication (e.g., shares information that their facilitator does not know about), can be documented over time. We also recommend that an individual's team document progress on independence, working with multiple facilitators, message passing, and literacy skills. We believe that through careful observation and documentation (developing a personal portfolio), the effectiveness of FC for an individual can be evaluated.

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