The Communication Matrix
by Charity Rowland, Ph.D., _©1990, 1996, 2004
WHAT IS IT? & HOW DO I DO IT?

By Sara Kitchen, TSBVI Outreach, September, 18, 2009

What Is It?

Assesses Communication Skills

- For individuals at the EARLIEST stages of communication development

- For individuals who use ANY form of communication, including pre-symbolic or alternative and augmentative forms up to those who use abstract forms.

Organization of Assessment

- Four reasons to Communicate:

    1. Reject/Refuse

    2. Obtain/Request

    3. Socialize

    4. Get/Give Information

- Seven levels of communicative competence that fall into three categories:

    1. Non-intentional Communication

    2. Intentional Communication

    3. Symbolic communication

Non-Intentional Communication:

Behavior is interpreted by parent / caregiver

Level I: Pre-Intentional Behavior

Behaviors are reflexes of the child's internal state.

Examples include: fussing, wriggling-wet/tired/hungry, quiet but alert-fed/rested

Level II: Intentional Behavior

Behaviors are under child's control but, child does not yet know he can affect parent.

Examples include: vocalizations, turning toward/away from desired object/person, taking desired object, etc.

Intentional Behavior vs. Intentional Communication

- You will know your child is intentionally trying to communicate when she/he:
    - Orients toward you by looking at you, facing you, or reaching toward you before acting
    - Waits for your response
- Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference, but it is a big deal when the child ilearns that he /she can affect others!
- Moving from intentional behavior to intentional communication is a big step!

Intentional Communication (a.k.a. pre-symbolic)

It's about the here and now:

Level III: Unconventional Communication

- Effective but not generally socially acceptable.
- Examples include tugging at someone, whining, jumping up and down, etc.

Level IV: Conventional Communication

- Learned through experience and modeling from others
- Examples include: pointing, nodding/shaking head, waving hello/goodbye, tapping someone on the shoulder
- Children who are visually impaired need to be shown because they don't see other people doing them.

Symbolic Communication

We can talk about the past and future:

Level V-Concrete symbols:

- Symbols look, feel move like, make sounds like what they represent, such as the container that the frozen juice comes from or the top of the juice container glued to a piece of cardboard.

Level VI-Abstract Symbols:

- Symbols don't look, feel, sound like, move like or smell like what they represent and are used one at a time, such as the written or spoken word "juice".

Level VII-Language:

- Abstract symbols are combined to form short sentences, such as "want juice".

How Do I Do It?

Instructions

- Use observations, interviews (including the Communication Matrix Especially for Parents), and interactions with the child to gain this information.

- Meet as a team, and ask yourselves each question under the "ASK THESE QUESTIONS" column.

- If the answer is "YES", circle the letter next to the behavior the child uses.

- Only check off behaviors child uses independently (without assistance or prompting) and consistently (occurring most times when opportunity arises)

- Make a note where child is using a behavior inconsistently. This behavior might be considered "Emerging".

- If the answer is "NO" move on to the next box.

- Transfer the information to the student profile sheet.

- Shade in the boxes where the child shows competence (uses at least one behavior independently and consistently)

- Put stripes in the boxes where the child shows emerging behaviors (uses behavior independently but not consistently).

Share the Results

- Copy the information the team filled out from pages 3-6 for each team member to keep in their notebook.

- Copy the completed profile and give one to each team member.

- Copy the information from "Especially for Parents" if used.