



Effective Interprofessional Communication Practices for People With Severe Disabilities

Communication is a basic need and a human right. The National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities (NJC) wrote the **Communication Bill of Rights**. The communication rights apply to all people. People with severe disabilities may need help to communicate effectively.

Interprofessional teams provide communication services and supports. A team includes the person with a disability, families, caregivers, speech-language pathologists, and other professionals. Teams do assessment and intervention.

- **Assessment** identifies a person's strengths and needs. It also identifies communication opportunities and barriers.
- **Intervention** builds the skills of the person and the communication partners.

Communication Assessment

Teams describe ways the person interacts. Teams consider

- what the person understands;
- ways the person communicates, such as with gestures, objects, signs, symbols, speech, or challenging behaviors;
- reasons why the person communicates, such as to comment, greet, or ask questions; and
- how the person communicates in different places, such as home, school, work, and community.

Teams also consider the person's

- age, culture, language(s);
- motor, vision, and hearing;
- likes and dislikes; and
- past experiences and opportunities.

Teams gather information in many ways. They observe how communication changes with different supports (teaching, prompting, and feedback). Teams also look for changes in communication over time.

Communication Intervention

Teams work together to set goals. Teams work to enhance communication and build social relationships. Interventions include all forms of communication, such as eye gaze, gestures, objects, speech, books, and speech-generating devices.

Teams should do all of the following:

- Focus on what matters to the person.
- Focus on what matters to communication partners.
- Build understanding and use of language.
- Include reading and writing skills.
- Focus on everyday places and daily routines.
- Involve different people, including peers.
- Provide services in a variety of places.

Teams may use many different approaches. Teams help communication partners support all types of communication. They help people make choices and advocate for themselves.

Communication services and supports should start early. They should continue through the lifespan.

See the NJC website for more information and resources:
www.asha.org/njc/