

# Communication

## OUTCOMES

When you finish this session, you will be able to:

- Identify effective ways to ensure the IP's understanding of individuals.
- Identify ways to modify communication to ensure understanding.
- Identify ways to resolve conflict by using active listening and "I" messages.
- Describe ways to overcome communication barriers to expression.
- Identify ways to support individuals' communication in their daily routines.

## KEY WORDS

**Active listening:** This kind of listening requires that a person hears the words, figures out what they mean, and responds to the words in his or her own words.

**Communication:** Sharing thoughts, views, and feelings.

**Communication boards:** Electronic modes of communication that individuals carry with them.

**"I" statements:** Talking about a conflict from one's own point of view.

**Modes of communication:** The ways in which language and communication can be expressed.

**Nonverbal:** Communication that is expressed without words.

**Sign language:** The mode of communication used in the deaf community. Sign language combines the use of hand shapes, hand and arm movements, facial expressions, gestures, and body language in a structured and conventional manner to express thoughts, views, and feelings.

## Opening Scenario

*Matthew has cerebral palsy. Because of his developmental disability, Matthew has trouble talking and being understood when speaking words. In his Individual Service Plan (ISP), Matthew has a goal to use a variety of different ways to communicate. Susan, a new IP is very fond of Matthew and has been trying to get him to practice talking more. Lately Susan has stopped using Matthew's picture communication system with him and ignores Matthew when he uses gestures or sign language. Matthew has been trying to ask her for a drink of juice using his picture system. Susan has ignored him, saying to him, "Matthew, you just need to learn to talk." Matthew tries using the sign he knows for drink. Susan again ignores him saying, "I don't understand that stuff. Matthew, you really can try to tell me in words." Matthew is very frustrated and just can't get the words out. He is very thirsty and angry. He falls to the floor and starts screaming and crying.*

**What does this scenario tell you about the importance of communication?**

## Communication

**C**ommunication is a very important tool in the IP toolbox. Good communication will help the IP reduce confusion and frustration and improve the quality of life for everyone in the home. Good communication skills can reduce IP stress. Good communication skills are a vital component to decision making and problem solving. It is the basis for recognizing the needs of the individual and providing high quality support. Knowing how to communicate with simple, clear statements will lead to

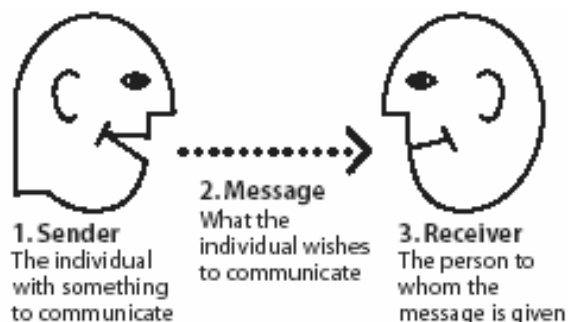
more positive interactions with the individuals you support, their families, coworkers, and community members.

This session will enhance the IP's skills related to:

- Communicating with individuals.
- Facilitating individuals' communication with others.
- Communicating with coworkers and community members.

## What is Communication?

Communication is about sharing thoughts, views, feelings, needs and preferences. There are three parts to all communication:



When an individual decides to send a message, the intent is to:

- Express something meaningful to him or her.
- Achieve a purpose.
- Share thoughts, views, and feelings with other people.

## Reasons for Communicating

Why do people communicate with each other? People have many different reasons to communicate during the course of each day. One very important reason for communicating is to gain more control of our lives and to participate in our communities. More specifically, people communicate in order to:

### ▪ **Give and get information**

For the IP, this could mean giving information to parents or family members about an individual's progress or letting the case manager know about an unusual incident. It could mean asking other IPs their opinion on an activity before deciding what to do. Or you may need to check with the case manager and the family before changing the way in which you approach an Individual Service Plan (ISP) objective. For individuals, this could mean asking about the day's plans, meals, what to wear, or when they want to see their friends. It includes asking questions and offering thoughts, views, or understandings.

### ▪ **Express feelings**

Individuals may want you to know when they have had a great day or when they are feeling bad.

### ▪ **Solve problems**

You may need to communicate with others to work out problems and to help those people solve their own issues.

### ▪ **Learn new things**

Individuals will need to know how to gain skills, such as oral health and hygiene skills, cooking, taking care of their money, or how to make their needs known.

### ▪ **Persuade others**

Individuals may want to have others see things their way. This could mean something as simple as choosing clothing different from what was offered.

### ▪ **Make decisions**

The IP communicates with many people about how to make decisions that affect individuals they support. Maybe you are trying to figure out how to deal with someone's behavior. There might be communication with family members or the case manager.

### ▪ **Build relationships**

The IP communicates with community members, neighbors, and friends and with individuals he or she works with and supports. All relationships happen using some form of communication. Individuals use communication skills to get to know other people; for example, finding out what the other people like to do.

### Verbal Communication

**Verbal communication** is the most common way individuals exchange information. Verbal communication is a complex skill, which requires attending to another person's hearing, thought, and speaking abilities. There are many points at which a breakdown could occur when using verbal communication. Verbal communication can be broken into four parts.

1. **Organizing the message.** This begins with the thought process of what the individual wishes to say.
2. **Sending the message.** The individual transfers the thought into spoken words, which are delivered to another person.
3. **Receiving the message.** The person receiving the message hears the message and attends to it.
4. **Processing the message.** The brain of the person receiving the message decides what the intended message means.

Excerpted from the *Caregiver Manual & Resource Guide for Southwest Florida*, Florida Gulf Coast University, 2002.

### Nonverbal Communication

**Nonverbal communication** is communication that is expressed without words. Sometimes a sender's message gets mixed up, and the receiver doesn't understand it.

At these times, you have to rely on your nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication is often more effective since there is less chance for breakdown to occur. Generally the receiver needs to attend to the sender and see the

nonverbal communication to understand it. Nonverbal communication can also be used to overcome other barriers to communication, for example difficulty speaking due to cerebral palsy. Following are some examples of nonverbal communication:

#### ▪ **Facial expressions**

You may be able to tell what an individual is feeling by his or her facial expression. For example, usually a smile means the individual is happy, and a frown means that he or she might be sad.

#### ▪ **Gestures**

These are hand, body, and facial movements that have meaning. Examples are putting your hands up as if to say "I don't know," or shaking your head to say "Yes" or "No," or waving to an individual in order to say, "Come closer, please."

#### ▪ **Volume of voice**

You usually know how people feel if they are yelling, or if they talk very softly.

#### ▪ **Physical closeness**

Standing close to people usually means they know each other well. Most people try to stay about an arm's length away from the person to whom they are talking.

## Modes of Communication

Now you know that communication can be either verbal or nonverbal. The variety of ways communication can be expressed are called **modes of communication**. Modes are either verbal or nonverbal. Common modes of communication include:

### ▪ Spoken language

Spoken language is the mode of communication that uses speech in words and sounds that are conventional and structured. Individuals who have survived a stroke may understand spoken language but not have developed speech skills. They may use speech mixed with other forms of communication to make their needs known.

### ▪ Written language

Written language is not always written in full sentences or spelled correctly. It is meaningful communication when the sender and receiver understand the context of the written language. For example, if an individual is in the grocery store and writes the word “cheese,” she or he may wish to buy cheese. However, if the individual is in the kitchen with the refrigerator door open and writes the word “cheese,” this time it may mean, “Help me find the cheese.”

### ▪ Sign language

Sign language is the mode of communication used in the deaf community. In the United States, the standard sign language is American Sign Language. It combines the use of hand shapes, hand and arm movements, facial expressions, gestures, and body language in a structured and conventional manner to express thoughts, views, and feelings.

American Sign Language has its own alphabet, words, and syntax. The American Sign Language alphabet can be found in Appendix B.

### ▪ Sign systems

Sign systems are based on American Sign Language and have been adapted to the needs of individuals who are in schools and whose learning styles limit their use of spoken language. Many individuals who have developmental delays use signs that combine parts of American Sign Language and local, school, or home-based signs. The American Sign Language dictionary listed in Appendix B provides a basic list of words for the IP to use as a reference tool.

### ▪ Communication books

Communication books are a mode of communication that contain pictures, words, photographs, or symbols. They can be used separately or combined in one book. Individuals who use these books might point to the message they wish to send or use the book in combination with speech or even with signing. Communication books are developed based upon each individual’s needs and abilities.

### ▪ Communication boards

Communication boards are electronic modes of communication that individuals carry with them. Some individuals use a board that has letters on it, like a computer keyboard. They point to the letters that spell words so someone can understand them. Some people have electronic systems that use pictures or symbols or that attach to

computer monitors. Some systems have a voice that repeats the word, sign, or symbol to which the individual points.

▪ **Behavior**

Behavior can tell you a lot if you “listen” to what it is saying. Among other things, it gives you information about what individuals want, when they are unhappy, and their interest in being social.

Some of the things that behavior can communicate are individuals’:

- Preferences or choices
- Requests for objects
- Requests for assistance
- Requests for affection
- Desire for attention
- Feelings

The purpose of all modes of communication is to support individuals as they make choices and interact. It is important that IPs are able to identify the modes of communication that individuals use and support them in using those modes.

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	
<b>“Listening” to What Behaviors Are Communicating</b>	
<i>Directions: Read the following behaviors in the left column. In the right column, write down what you think the behaviors are communicating.</i>	
<b>Behavior</b>	<b>What could that behavior be communicating?</b>
<i>Example:</i> Bob points to an apple on the table and then points to his mouth.	Bob wants to eat the apple.
Martha smiles and shakes your hand.	
Dan comes to you with a toothbrush in one hand, toothpaste in the other hand, and a confused look on his face.	
Lisa spits peas onto the table.	
Juan tugs at your sleeve.	

## Communication Disorders

You have learned about some of the ways that people communicate. In part, the mode of communication is influenced by communication disorders that an individual may have. Some of the things that can get in the way of an individual being understood include:

- Limited or no speech.
- Hearing loss.
- Poor control of muscles needed to produce speech (like with cerebral palsy).
- Damage to the part of the brain that controls speech.
- Challenging behaviors.
- Day-to-day health of the individual.

When it is hard to make your needs known, it's difficult to meet people and to do the things you enjoy and it may make an individual behave in a negative way.

There are two kinds of communication disorders:

### 1. Speech Disorders

Speech disorders relate to the muscles that people use to form the sounds of speech. There are four types of speech disorders:

#### **Abnormal pitch**

This is a condition in which an individual's voice is high-pitched or very deep. It is similar to the difference between a man's and a woman's voice. Men's voices are usually lower toned or pitched than women's.

#### **Abnormal quality**

This is a disorder in which an individual makes the sounds, but the sounds last

longer or shorter than usual or are molded together in a way that make it hard to understand. It is similar to a tape recording that has gotten too old so that the tape moves slowly or a tape recording that, at the end of the tape, moves fast so the voices sound high pitched and fast.

#### **Excessive loudness**

This is a condition in which individuals almost shout rather than talk.

#### **Incorrect articulation**

This is a condition where the individual's mouth makes sounds incorrectly. Perhaps a "p" is pronounced with a voice and breathing like a "b" sound. Another example is an individual's inability to make the sound at all with his or her lips, which keeps the listener wondering what he or she meant. Sometimes speech muscles that don't work cause a speech disorder. You may hear a speech therapist who works for someone you support talk about this. Some individuals may miss sounds when they are talking, like saying "nake" for "snake," or "moke" for "smoke." Or an individual might say "dis" and "dat" instead of "this" and "that."

### 2. Language Disorders

Language disorders are sometimes caused by damage to some area of the brain. With a language disorder an individual might be limited in his or her ability to understand language. This is called receptive language. An individual's ability to talk might be limited. This is called expressive language. Or, a person may talk as if they are much younger.

## Supporting Individuals During Daily Routines, *continued*

Once the IP has identified the individual's modes of communicating, his or her responsibility is to encourage communication during daily routines. Each time the IP and the individual are together is a chance to initiate communication. This will help individuals feel more in control of their lives and participate in their communities in a meaningful way. Following are some suggestions for supporting individuals' communication every day:

- **Create opportunities during the day to promote conversations with individuals.**

For example, talk to the individual while doing personal care, oral hygiene, eating, and dressing routines. These are opportunities for you to learn more about individuals' modes of communication and their preferences.

- **Allow individuals time to respond.**

Sometimes people are so busy that they ask a question and don't really wait for a response. How many times have you asked someone "How are you?" without waiting to hear their answer? It is important to keep in mind that some individuals may take longer to understand a question. Others may need time to formulate their response. Sometimes the response may take a very long time.

- **Acknowledge the individual's attempt to communicate.**

Remember that everyone communicates in different ways. Even a small sound or gesture needs to be noticed. That will let the individual know that what they are trying to tell you is important to you.

- **Provide your employer with opportunities to make their own choices and avoid making decisions for them.**

If you have known an individual for a long time, you often think you know what they need and want. However, individuals' needs and preferences may change over time. It is essential to create opportunities for individuals to communicate their needs and preferences. One way to do this is to provide "choice opportunities." Choice opportunities are situations in which someone is provided with a choice between two or more items or activities. You can offer choices throughout the daily routine. For example, "Do you want to brush your teeth with Crest® or Colgate®?" "Do you want pizza or steak for dinner?" "Would you like to go for a walk or go to a movie?"

- **Talk to the individual about routines as they occur.**

It is important to talk about activities as you do them. Imagine if you had to go through a day in total silence. By talking through each activity, you increase the chances that the individual will learn the words, as well as the order of the activities. You should talk through routines with the individuals you support even if you don't know if they really understand. You don't always know what the individual understands.

What the IP teaches about communication is as important as how it is taught. If an individual is communicating through pictures or graphic symbols, the IP may need to spend more structured time to assure that

## Supporting Individuals During Daily Routines, *continued*

The symbol matches what the individual wants to communicate. The IP would also want to use those symbols throughout the day for routines and activities so that there are many chances to practice them. For someone who is learning to make choices through facial expressions, you would also want to make sure that there are a number of chances for him or her to make a choice and to practice facial expressions.

### Scenario: Missed Opportunity

#### Featuring



**Helen**

An 83 year-old woman



**Mona**

Helen's individual provider

*Helen is seated at the dining room table. Mona is preparing dinner.*

Mona enters the dining room with a plate of food. She sets it on the table in front of Helen and leaves the room.

A few moments later, Mona enters the room again with a glass filled with water. She sets it on the table and leaves again.

Mona re-appears and hands Helen a napkin. Mona retreats back into the kitchen.

1. What is the missed opportunity?
2. What would you do differently?
3. How does Helen feel?

## Scenario: Everyday Communication

### Featuring



**David**

A 29 year-old man



**Jessie**

David's individual  
provider

*David is sitting at the table in his kitchen while Jessie is preparing food.*

Jessie: “Hey, David! Would you like some nachos?”

Jessie brings a plate to the table after David says he wants nachos.

Jessie: “Okay. Just pull the Saran Wrap back. Be careful because it’s pretty hot.”

David begins to eat

Jessie: “Would you like an apple?”

After thinking for a moment, David says that he’d like an apple. Jessie brings an apple to David at the table.

Jessie: “How about some salsa for your chips?”

David nods “yes.” Jessie brings the salsa to the table and loosens the lid on the jar.

Jessie: “Okay, David—just undo the top and pour out how much you want.”

David pours out enough salsa for his chips.

Jessie: “Perfect! All right, David—enjoy!”

1. What did the IP do well?
2. What could the IP do better?
3. Does David’s quality of life change?

## Strategies for Making Communication a Part of Every Day

- Use words when the individual feels something (sore, hurt, tired).
- Name objects during daily routines.
- Point out objects while on a walk, in the car, at the park, or in the store.
- Point to pictures of objects in books and say them clearly.
- Have the individual watch your mouth as you say words.
- Speak in short sentences when giving directions.
- Be sure to pronounce the entire word.
- Encourage progress in making sounds and saying words.
- Be sure your movements are simple when teaching.
- Encourage individuals to use all of their senses.
- Listen carefully to what the individual says or attempts to say.

### ACTIVITY

#### Supporting Individuals in Their Daily Routines

*Directions: Imagine an individual you will support and one routine that they will do on a daily basis (for example, brushing their teeth, bathing, eating breakfast). Using the Strategies for Making Communication a Part of Every Day and your own strategies, write down three ways that you can encourage that individual's communication during that routine.*

Daily routine: \_\_\_\_\_

Strategies I use to encourage communication during this routine:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Scenario: Poor Communication

### Featuring



**David**  
A 29 year-old man



**Kami**  
David's individual provider



**Jessie**  
David's individual provider

*David is sitting at the kitchen table while Kami is preparing his lunch. In the background, a countertop television is blaring. Kami is really focused on the talk show on television.*

Kami: "David!! Come in here! It's time to eat!"

Noticing David already at the table, she quickly slaps some salad onto his plate. Her eyes never leave the television.

David: "Kami...Kami...KAMI! I hate salad!"

Kami flicks her hand as if she's inconvenienced and begins serving David some casserole as she watches the television.

David: "Kami, there's onions in this. I don't like onions, either."

Kami continues to serve food. She manages to pour a glass of water for David without missing much of her television show.

Jessie arrives for her afternoon shift and sees David seated in front of his food.

Jessie: "Good afternoon, David!" Noticing the problem, she says, "Kami, David doesn't have any silverware." Jessie brings a fork to David.

1. What mistakes did you read?
2. What would you do differently?
3. Did the individual's quality of life change?

## Active Listening

Until now, this session has focused on communicating with individuals and facilitating individuals' communication. We will now discuss how IPs communicate with each other and with other people supporting the employer.

### Active Listening

Each of us shares the responsibility for good communication. Listening is a key skill to good communication.

Realistically the life of an IP doesn't always lend itself to those private moments when listening would be easy. When you add more people and their interests, you've increased the difficulty of listening.

Effective IPs develop the skills to both assist individuals to communicate and to listen very carefully. Another role of the IP is to learn how to communicate effectively with other team members, including:

- Family members
- Case managers
- Neighbors
- Co-workers
- Work or program staff at jobs or day programs

NOTE: Remember that in order to protect your employer's privacy, you should only share information with people who are listed on the Individual Service Plan. In some cases, neighbors or co-workers are part of an employer's care team—but not always.

We all need to take the time to figure out the words we hear. We may even need to ask the person who said them if we heard correctly before we respond. That means that we have to pay very close attention to each word the person is saying. This is called **active listening** because it involves a lot of energy. The steps for active listening are:

- Hear the words.
- Figure out their meaning.
- Respond to the meaning in your own words.

Hearing what a person says is not the same as listening. It happens when you take time to see if what you understood was what the person really meant. Your response is a way to "check" if the individual feels heard and that the communication was understood. The ways that the IP can do this are to:

- Ask the speaker questions to see if the understanding is correct.
- Re-word the statement and say it back for clarification. For example: "What I hear you saying is that you feel frustrated. Is that correct?"

Sometimes it is important to not only hear the words but to "actively listen" to the individual's behavior or other modes of communication.

## Conflict Resolution

To this point, this session has focused on assisting individuals learn how to communicate and IPs becoming good communicators. There will be times, even with good communication, when people disagree. For example, the case manager and the individual you support may disagree about the goal an individual may have, a parent may disagree with the support given to an individual, or two individuals living together can disagree about what TV

program to watch. There are many times that an IP will encounter conflict. It is important to know how to effectively and professionally resolve conflict. Helping individuals be more independent may also mean teaching individuals how to resolve conflicts, how to solve their own problems, and how to make decisions. With those skills, the individuals you support can be more confident in their own abilities.

### ACTIVITY

#### Stepping into Another Person's Shoes

*Directions: Pair up with another person in the class, and ask the following questions. Write your partner's answers below.*

1. Did you share a bedroom growing up?
2. Do you share a home with someone now?
3. Was there ever a time when you didn't like sharing a room?
4. What made sharing a room or a house difficult?







## Method for Managing Conflict

Following is a method that you might use for managing conflict. This method may be helpful both at work and at home.

- **Separate the person from the problem.**

Put yourself in the other person's shoes, like you just did in the activity. Sometimes, something about the person is just annoying to you. It could be his or her voice or the way he dresses, or you don't like the way he lives his life. But you have to look just at the problem in order to resolve things. You have to control your emotions, even if the other person is doing things that really bother you. Mostly, you want to make sure that you understand each other.

- **Figure out each person's goals and interests.**

Concentrate on what each person wants most and try to find the places where there is agreement. Be open to meeting someone half way. Everyone should define how they see the problem, and the problem has to be discussed before solutions can be.

- **Find answers that work for both people.**

There are many different ways to find possible answers to the problem. One way is brainstorming, which you'll practice a little later. Explore all kinds of options before making a decision.

- **Try to agree.**

You may not come to agreement on a solution the first time that you discuss the problem. Sometimes, you have to review all of the options several times. Some people may want to think it over or discuss it with others. Once there is agreement, decide what the next steps might be. Who will do what, and when will that be done? Then figure out how to decide if the solution really worked.

## ACTIVITY

### Brainstorming

*Directions: Break into small groups or pairs. Read the following scenario. Next, brainstorm some ways that the money could be spent. Every idea that the group members suggest must be written down. Then, as a group, try to come to agreement on one of the suggestions.*

**Scenario:**

Your church group gave you \$100. The church members indicated that the money can be spent on any outing or special activity to support your employer. The only restriction is that your employer and her family must be a part of the decision-making process.

**Our group's ideas for how the money should be spent:**

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**We decided on this idea:**

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## Rules for Conflict Resolution

Below are some rules for resolving conflict. Rules like these are often used to help couples to communicate better. When you are discussing a difficult problem:

- **Use “I” statements.**

Using “I” statements means that you need to talk about the problem or disagreement from your own point of view. Look at the difference between the following statements:

“I feel much better when you call to let me know you’ll be late.”

“You never come home on time.”

The second example puts the blame for the problem on the other person and can make it difficult to resolve the problem.

- **Be willing to resolve the problem.**
- **Do not engage in name calling.**
- **Stay in the present and stick to the topic.**

Staying in the present and sticking to the topic means that you shouldn’t bring up problems that are not related to what you are discussing right now. Consider the following statements:

“You are acting just how you used to act five years ago when you never called home if you knew you would be late.”

“And I also am sick of you leaving your dirty clothes on the floor instead of putting them in the hamper.”

Statements like these take the focus off the problem at hand and make resolving it seem much less manageable.

- **Don’t interrupt the person who is talking.**
- **Recognize that the other person has his or her own feelings.**
- **Ask questions to understand the other person’s side.**

## SESSION 3 – COMMUNICATION: QUIZ

**1. To communicate with someone who has difficulty expressing thoughts and feelings verbally, you should:**

- A) Show pictures and ask them to make a choice.
- B) Ask them to repeat themselves until you understand.
- C) Ask them to speak louder.
- D) Prompt them with your own reply.

**2. An example of how an individual uses behavior to express a greeting is:**

- A) The individual walks away from you when you say “Hello!”
- B) The individual comes to you and shakes your hand.
- C) The individual signs to you.
- D) The individual looks at you when you say, “Hello!”

**3. The IP ensures good communication with individuals by:**

- A) Speaking clearly.
- B) Listening to the individual, watching his or her behavior and repeating back to the individual for understanding.
- C) Talking loudly.
- D) Looking at the individual when he or she talks.

**4. Using an “I” message means to:**

- A) Tell team members what you want them to do
- B) Use the word “I” before asking for help
- C) Be a good listener
- D) Hear the other person’s words, think about their meaning and respond to the meaning.

**5. An example of how to be a good listener is to:**

- A) Walk away from the speaker if you don’t agree with what is being said.
- B) Always look at the speaker, smile and be happy.
- C) Watch body language, wait for answers and read facial expressions.
- D) Ask the speaker to repeat herself.

**6. Nonverbal ways that individuals sometimes communicate include:**

- A) Using facial expressions, gestures and pointing.
- B) Being quiet.
- C) Singing out loud.
- D) Looking around the room and sitting down silently.

**7. Social skills that help communication include:**

- A) Showing attention to the individual while talking.
- B) Laughing and enjoying communication.
- C) Asking the individual to repeat himself.
- D) Walking while talking.

**8. The most serious barriers to communication include:**

- A) Television watching and loss of sleep.
- B) Hearing loss, limited use of muscles or day-to-day health of the individual.
- C) Having many needs.
- D) Having no friends

**9. Ways to improve communication include:**

- A) Avoid anticipating the individual's needs.
- B) Using drawings for picture communication.
- C) Sitting with the individual after mealtime to talk.
- D) All of the above.

**10. One way the IP can improve communication:**

- A) Acknowledge the individual's attempt to communicate.
- B) Be sure to look at the individual when giving directions.
- C) Provide five choices for the individual.
- D) Give the individual candy or fruit whenever he or she asks for something.