

Receptive and Expressive Communication

[Adapted from NTAC: The National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind. (2002). Communication fact sheets for parents.]

Communication is the exchange of messages between at least two people. Receptive communication is the process of receiving and understanding a message from another person. It can be thought of as the input. Expressive communication is a message to another person. It is the means by which feelings, wants, likes, dislikes, comments, and intents are expressed. It can be thought of as the output. For effective communication, both expressive and receptive communication must occur.

WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

As social beings, we must be able to receive and understand messages from others. We must also be able to send messages to inform others of our wants, needs, choices, thoughts, and feelings. Expressive and receptive communication allow for people to be connected.

When we engage in turn-taking activities with a child, we show them how to use both expressive and receptive communication. As we exchange roles with the child as the expresser and the receiver, the child has an opportunity to have a conversation, not merely to respond to a command or directive.

When communicating with a child who is deaf-blind, there may be one form of communication for expression and a different one for reception. Choosing a form will depend on the child's social, physical, perceptual, and cognitive skills.

Typically developing children and children with disabilities usually understand different forms of receptive communication before they are able to use them for expression. Some typically developing children need to hear a word 1,000 times before they are able to use it correctly. Children with deaf-blindness also need to hear, see, or feel gestures, objects, signs, or words many times before they will be able to use them receptively or expressively.

EXAMPLES OF RECEPTIVE COMMUNICATION FORMS

- Object cues and touch cues
- Pictures

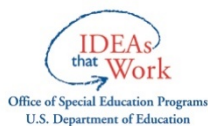
- Photos
- Gestures
- Tangible representations
- Sign language
- Speech/vocalizations

EXAMPLES OF EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION FORMS

- Body movements
- Touching objects or persons
- Challenging behavior
- Gestures
- Vocalizations
- Tangible symbols, pictures, or photographs
- Speech
- Written word
- Sign language
- Augmentative modes - aids or techniques that supplement speech

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Use communication forms that take advantage of a child's existing vision and hearing
- Children will usually understand a form before they use it (unless they are imitating)
- Use of the child's form of communication in everyday settings will pay off



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