

# Communication Services for Individuals with Severe Disabilities: Current “Best Practices”

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The National Joint Committee for the Communication  
Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities (NJC)

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## NJC: Mission & Purpose

- To provide information & advocate for the communication needs of persons with severe disabilities
- To promote research, demonstration & educational efforts directed toward helping persons with severe disabilities communicate effectively

## Current Member Organizations

- American Association on Mental Retardation (**AAMR**)
- American Occupational Therapy Association (**AOTA**)
- American Physical Therapy Association (**APTA**)
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (**ASHA**)
- Council for Exceptional Children (**CEC**), Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness (**DCDD**)
- **RESNA**
- **TASH**
- United States Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (**USSAAC**)

## Assessment Strategies

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# Intervention Strategies

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## Intervention Strategies

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- Overview of intervention techniques
  - Global interaction techniques
  - Responsive interaction techniques
  - Milieu teaching techniques
- Selected case examples illustrating communication interventions with individuals
  - Children with severe disabilities
  - All with severely limited natural speech
  - Varying degrees of motor & visual impairment

# Intervention Strategies

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Interactions are experienced mutually by communication partners & both parties are affected reciprocally.

(Siegel & Cress, 2002)

## A Tri-Focus Framework

(Siegel & Bashinski, 1996)

**Learner** - Actualize existing communication forms & functions & systematically target new forms and functions (horizontal & vertical targets)

**Communication environment** - Improve contexts to promote learner's communication abilities

**Communication partners** - Enhance partners' understanding of the learner's communication & broaden partners' ability to use strategies that build interaction and communication

# Intervention Practices & Procedures

(Wilcox & Shannon, 1998)

Responsive Interaction Techniques	Milieu Teaching Techniques	Global Interaction Techniques
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention strategies embedded in typical activities</li> <li>• Adult targets specific communication behaviors but does not attempt to elicit child responses</li> <li>• Adult follows child's attentional lead &amp; provides focused input (e.g., models, expansions, recasts) to increase saliency of targeted behaviors</li> <li>• Basic efficacy well-established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention strategies embedded in typical activities</li> <li>• Adult targets specific behaviors with provisions for eliciting child responses</li> <li>• Adult teaches to child's attentional lead &amp; may request child to imitate or use specific behavior (e.g., incidental teaching, mand model, time delay)</li> <li>• Basic efficacy well-established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention not directly provided to the child</li> <li>• Train communication partners in strategies known to facilitate communication &amp; language development</li> <li>• Goal is to enhance communicative interactions (turn-taking, initiating &amp; responding); specific communication behaviors must be targeted.</li> <li>• Efficacy established for improved interactions, not child language behaviors</li> </ul>

## Global interaction techniques

Communication partners are trained in strategies such as...

### ...Waiting

Adult uses a slow pace during conversation; adult actively listens to the child & does not dominate the conversation

### ...Pausing

Adult pauses expectantly & frequently during interactions to encourage turn-taking & active participation

### ...Labeling

Adult provides labels for actions, objects, feelings, etc.

### ...Imitating

Adult imitates & repeats child's communication behaviors

Examples adapted from Laura Justice(2004).

## Case examples illustrating intervention techniques



Partner Training



Responsive Interaction



Milieu Teaching

## Global Interaction: Communication Partner Training

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Baseline:	V. uses intentional behavior (eye gaze, facial expression, body movement) to make choices, express preferences, refuse). Behaviors may be subtle &/or difficult to interpret in context. When signals are misinterpreted or missed by partners, V. typically protrudes lower lip & then cries.
Learner Goals	Make clear choices that can be recognized by familiar partners using eye gaze & vocalization
Partner Goals	Present items to V. in ways that allow him to express a clear choice. Recognize & respond to Vs signals.

## Response Interaction Techniques

Baseline:	Student uses forms & for several functions that are subtle and may go unrecognized by partners. Student sometimes initiates & responds during interactions with partners.
Learner goals:	Increase use of existing communication behaviors to initiate & respond during communicative interactions with trained, familiar communication partners
Partner strategies:	Observe & wait for student to initiate; recognize & respond to his communicative behaviors by interpreting & modeling

## Milieu Teaching Techniques

Baseline:	Emerging use of intentional behaviors & intentional communication, small number of forms & functions, limited opportunities to initiate & respond in ongoing activities
Learner goals	Increase use of new communicative forms & functions (vertical & horizontal targets) with trained communication partners
Partner strategies	Create opportunities for communication, implement consistent use of time delay to elicit forms for existing functions & mand modeling (Say "go") to develop use of new forms forms for existing functions

## Summary

In a tri-focus approach, the intervention aim is to improve interactions & intervention takes place concurrently with the learner with severe disabilities, the communication partners, and the communication context.

Regardless of technique, best clinical practice for improving communicative interactions involving individuals with severe disabilities should:

1. Use multiple, meaningful interactive contexts
2. Systematically plan for high frequency of learning opportunities
3. Be consistent across settings and partners
4. Systematically monitor outcomes

## Teaming Strategies

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## Issues & Future Research

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