

How to support someone who is non-verbal or minimally verbal

If someone is non-verbal, this means that they cannot speak, or can only speak a few words. However, this does not mean they cannot communicate. Equally, someone who is minimally verbal (and can only speak a few words), can be supported to communicate clearly and fully. The following strategies can be used to support communication with someone non-verbal:

- If they can understand questions, establish a yes/no response, so you can check and receive consent for certain activities. This does not have to be a nod or shake of the head; it can be anything which is within the individual's mobility capability or can be an established sound.
- Emphasise key words, or point to items or pictures of items, to give extra support.
- Offer pen and paper for people to write or draw if they prefer
- Use social stories or comic strips to explain processes or events.
- Use visual supports such as cue boards (which are boards where you have the alphabet, common words or symbols to help people to communicate).
- Use sign language or Makaton
- Use PECS which facilitates communication through picture symbols. These are often paper-based but there are also app versions.
- Use a VOCA (voice output communication aid) which can turn an individual's text or the symbols they select into speech.

Sources and further reading:

[Providing Effective care to people with communication difficulties \(sth.nhs.uk\)](http://sth.nhs.uk)

[Social stories and comic strip conversations \(autism.org.uk\)](http://autism.org.uk)

[Visual supports \(autism.org.uk\)](http://autism.org.uk)

[Home \(makaton.org\)](http://makaton.org)

[Picture Exchange Communication System \(PECS\) \(pecs-unitedkingdom.com\)](http://pecs-unitedkingdom.com)

[Communication aids and augmentative and alternative communication \(AAC\) - Sense](#)

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