The Special Populations Unit



ODP Recommendation #1

"Assure Effective Communication"

Every person has an effective way to communicate in order to express choice and ensure his or her health and safety.



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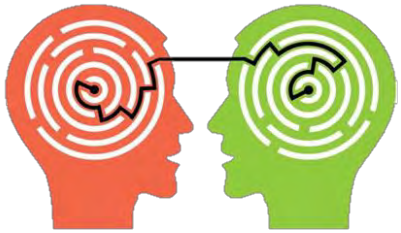
What is effective communication?



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What are we talking about? Communication is…

- Expressing feelings
  - Happy, sad, good, bad, hungry, etc.
- Asking questions
- Protesting
- Requesting
- Directing
- Commenting and giving opinions
- Sharing news
- Conversation



Communication Bill of Rights

- Dignity and respect in all interactions
- Meaningful communication that is culturally and linguistically appropriate
- Addressed directly and not be spoken for or talked about as if not there
- Receive a response to all communication, even when the desired outcome is not possible
- Participate across settings as full communication partners
- Interact socially and to build and keep relationships
- To be given and to understand information
- Ask for or refuse
- Express preferences and feelings, make comments, and share opinions
- Make choices from meaningful options
- Access services and supports for communication across the lifespan
- Individualized, working augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems and other assistive technology (AT) at all times

Quarterly Communication Corner Newsletter



Communication Corner

Empowering Connections through Effective Communication

September 2026

Fall Issue

This Issue:

—

Communication Spotlight – Bridging the Gap from Classroom to Community Transition Resource

—

Communication Tips - How to Support Effective Communication Across Environments

—

Stories that Matter

—

Resources and Upcoming Events

—

Communication Tools – Visual Schedules

—

Did you Know?

Communication Spotlight

Communication and successful transition!

The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) published an updated resource; "Bridging the Gap from Classroom to Community: Transition Resources Related to Communication", with a new and improved design!

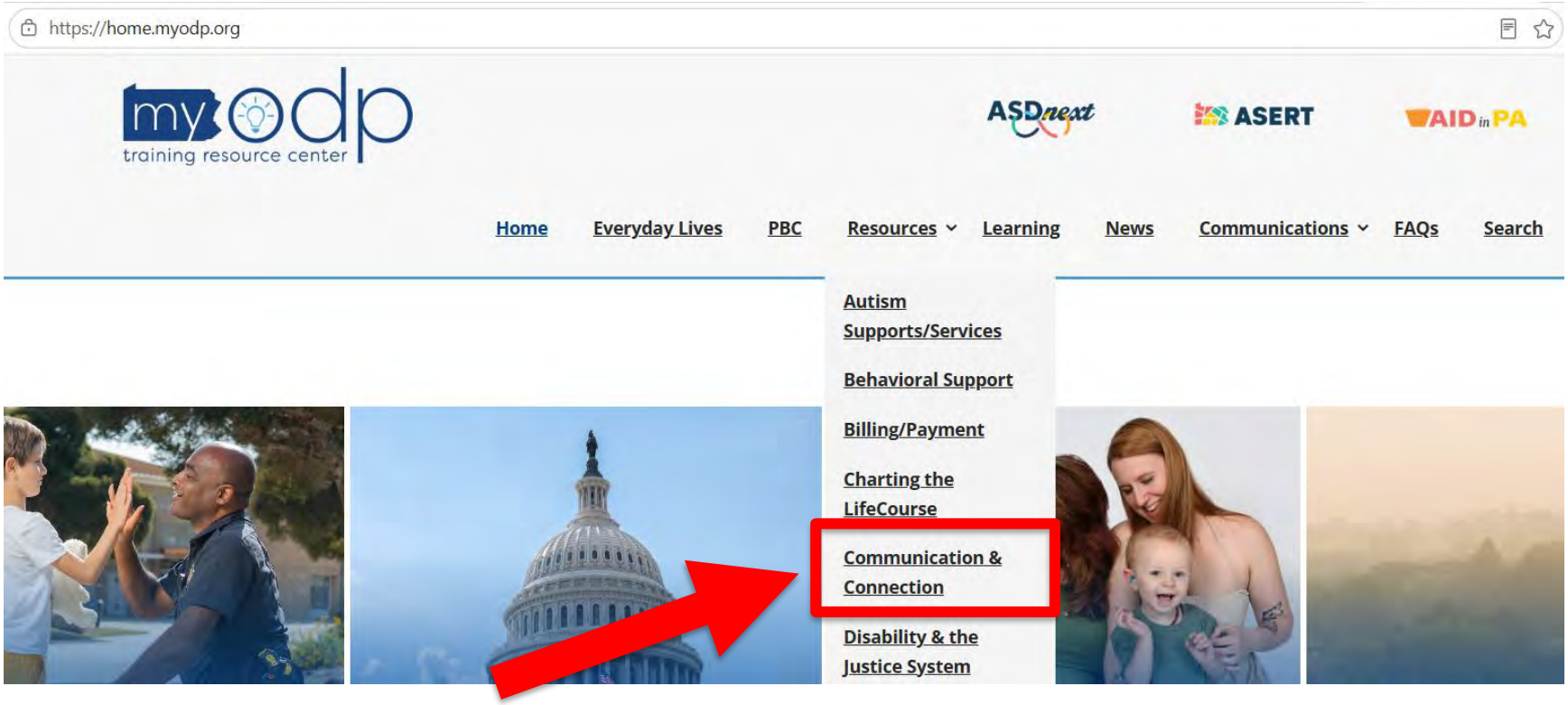
As a new school year begins, many students with disabilities and their families may be starting to think about the transition to life after high school. Most of the time transition planning includes preparing for work or post-secondary education, but communication access is just as important in the planning process.

This resource provides information on how to ensure access to **effective communication** by mode, such as American Sign Language (ASL), tactile, and Visual Gestural Communication (VGC), during transition.

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Trainings, Tools, and Resources

home.myodp.org



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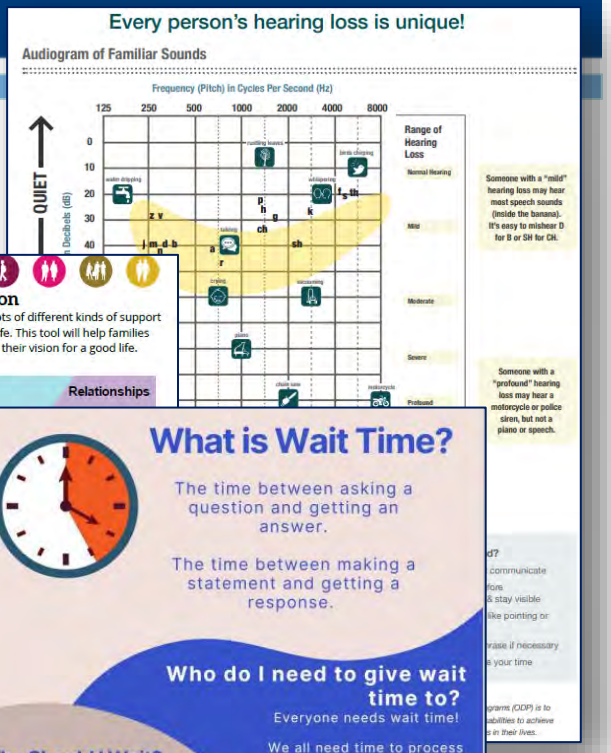


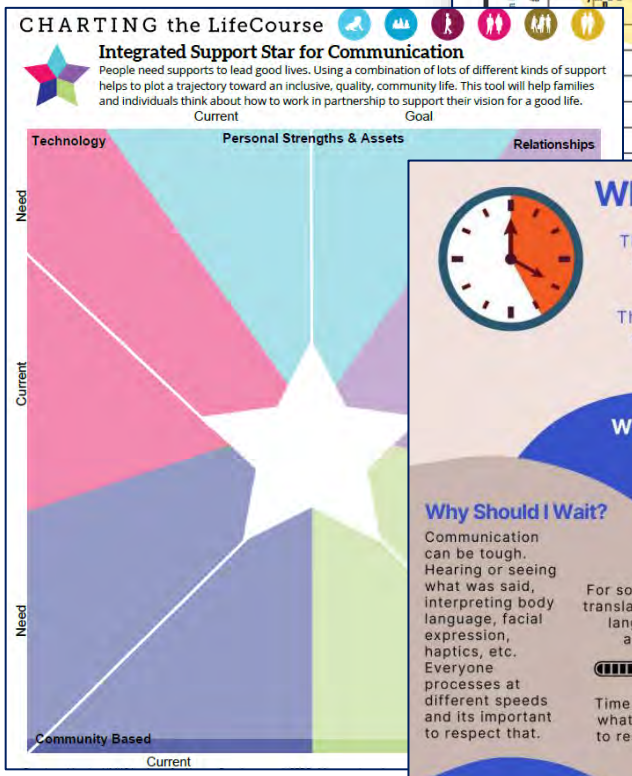


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Infographics









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Communication and… Series

Provides information on how
30+ diagnoses
could impact communication
and
offers strategies to support
effective communication.

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Communication and... Series

PURPOSE

The key to achieving effective communication with any person is for both parties to intentionally engage in the process and accept the responsibility for it. As a communication partner, one way to do this is to understand how specific conditions could be impacting effective communication. The goal of this series is to provide information on how each diagnosis could impact communication and offer strategies to support communicating well.

Remember, how each person is impacted will vary and effective communication access depends on each individual's unique needs.

Diagnoses Included:

- Alzheimer's Disease
- Angelman Syndrome
- Apraxia of Speech
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)
- Central Auditory Processing Disorder
- Cerebral Palsy
- CHARGE Syndrome
- Communication Disorder
- Conduct Disorder
- Cornelia de Lange Syndrome
- Cortical Visual Impairment
- Deaf-Blindness
- Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD)
- Down Syndrome
- Dyslexia
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Hearing Loss
- Huntington's Disease
- Idiosyncratic speech
- Language Deprivation
- Limited English Proficiency (LEP)
- Long COVID
- Multiple Sclerosis (MS)
- Parkinson's Disease
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Reactive Attachment Disorder
- Rett Syndrome
- Schizophrenia
- Sensory Processing Disorder
- Stroke
- Stuttering
- Tourette Syndrome
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Usher Syndrome
- Visual Impairment

Vision Guide

Guide provides some basic information on vision,

material on some of the most common eye disorders

and how they impact a person's vision,

as well as strategies to ensure effective communication.

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Communicating with Individuals who are Blind or have a Vision Impairment

EYE DISORDERS

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to offer resources in one central location for those who support or care for someone who has a vision impairment. This guide provides some basic information on vision, material on some of the most common eye disorders and how they impact a person's vision, as well as strategies to ensure effective communication when supporting these individuals. The key to achieving effective communication with a person with a vision impairment is to consciously accept the responsibility for it. How an individual is impacted will vary and communication access depends on individual needs, looking different for each person.

Some of Our Trainings

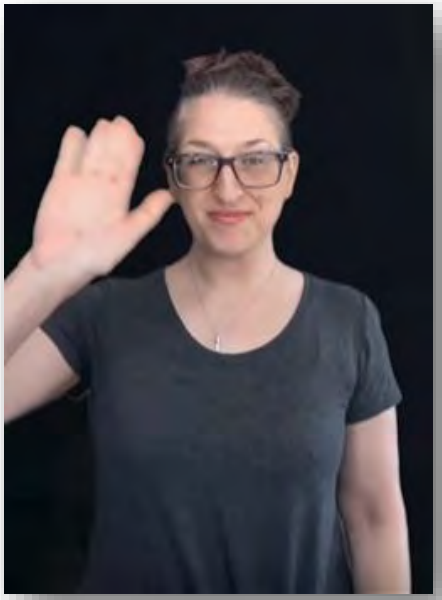
Best Practices Working with an Interpreter	The Seven Senses and Hand-under-Hand Prompting
How Communication Builds Resilience to Trauma	Reaching Communication Goals through Gradual Implementation
Deaf Sensitivity	Communication Matters
Deaf Space	Limited English Proficiency 101
Making Homes Accessible for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals	Navigating the Complexities of Meaningful & Functional Communication
Language Deprivation	Communication Disorders
DeafBlindness 101	Seven Levels of Communication
Communication Assessment Tools	Visual Gestural Communication
Took Kit for Communication and COVID-19	Wonderful World of Visual Schedules

Do you support someone who is Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind?



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Deaf Services Coordinator (DSC)



- **Lori R. Milcic, MAP, CI, CT, QMHI**
- Expertise in Deaf, hard of hearing, and DeafBlind individuals who have an intellectual disability or autism
- Over 25 years in the interpreting field
- Over 15 years studying language deprivation, high context communication, and communication assessment
- Collaboration with experts around the nation
- Contact Information:
  - C-LMilcic@pa.gov
  - Phone: 717-265-7760
  - Video Phone: 412-484-5824

Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind (DHHDB) Support

- Specialized training for people who support Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals
- Supports Coordinators are required to contact the Deaf Services Coordinator within 30 days of a DHHDB individual added to their caseload.
  - Person centered support
- Specialized communication assessments
- Technical assistance



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Supporting Individuals who are DeafBlind

- Collaboration opportunity with national experts, Helen Keller National Center
- A week-long experience, in the individual's home, community, etc. – called the 'DeafBlind Immersion Experience'
- Training day with an immersive experience on day 5
- For the entire team! Their entire circle of support to gain insights info effective DeafBlind strategies
- ODP funded

	Normal Hearing →	Hard of Hearing (mild to moderate)	Deaf (severe to profound)	Progressive Loss
Normal Vision ↓		Hearing Loss	Hearing Loss	Hearing Loss
Low Vision	Visually Impaired	Deaf-Blind	Deaf-Blind	Deaf-Blind
Legally Blind	Visually Impaired	Deaf-Blind	Deaf-Blind	Deaf-Blind
Progressive Loss	Visually Impaired	Deaf-Blind	Deaf-Blind	Deaf-Blind

Let us know if you know a team who would be a good fit for this experience!

DeafBlind Immersion Experiences



Do you support someone who uses Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)?



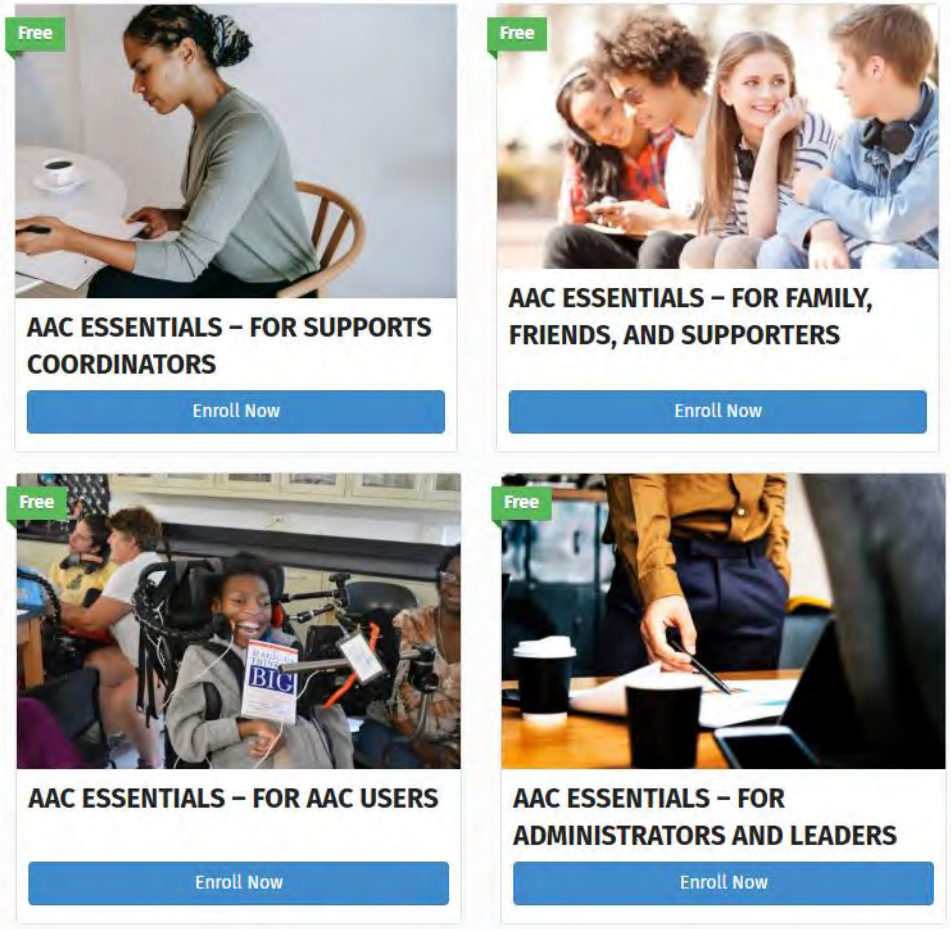
Did you know that October is AAC Awareness Month?

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Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

AAC Essentials Courses are FREE and are designed to increase your understanding of AAC for your particular role.

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Just SO Speech

- Available to anyone registered with the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP).
- Short-term (15 hours)
  - To serve the most people.
- Online (tele practice)
  - To serve all of Pennsylvania.
- Access to a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP).



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Other Resources

- Children's Advocacy Centers of PA Grant
- Participants will learn appropriate communication strategies for interviewing children with disabilities to support accurate information gathering while prioritizing the child's well-being.



- Registration Link (https://penncac.coalitionmanager.org/eventmanager/onlinetraining/details/969)
- Free, online, self-paced course broken into short modules
- 2 Continuing Law Enforcement Education (CLEE) credits approved by Municipal Police Officers' Education and Training Commission (MPOETC)

Some of our Partnerships

- Office of Child Development and Early Learning
- Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- Office of Children, Youth, and Families
- PA Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN)
- Helen Keller National Center
- PA Deaf-Blind Project
- Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services
- Chief Accessibility Officer, Office of Administration
- DHS, Refugee Resettlement Program
- Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD)
- Western PA School for Blind Children (WPSBC)
- Temple Institute on Disabilities
- Child Advocacy Centers of PA
- PA Developmental Disabilities Council

Write down two ideas for a communication training you would want for your agency – we will collect them

