



# ELHAP Communication Policy

## Context

Between 50% and 90% of people with learning disabilities have communication difficulties, whilst about 80% of those with severe learning disabilities do not acquire effective speech.

About 60% of people with learning disabilities overall have some skills in symbolic communication, such as signs or picture symbols.

About 20% have no verbal communication skills but do demonstrate intentional communication whilst up to 20% have no intentional communication skills.

**The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities (2000)**

## Introduction

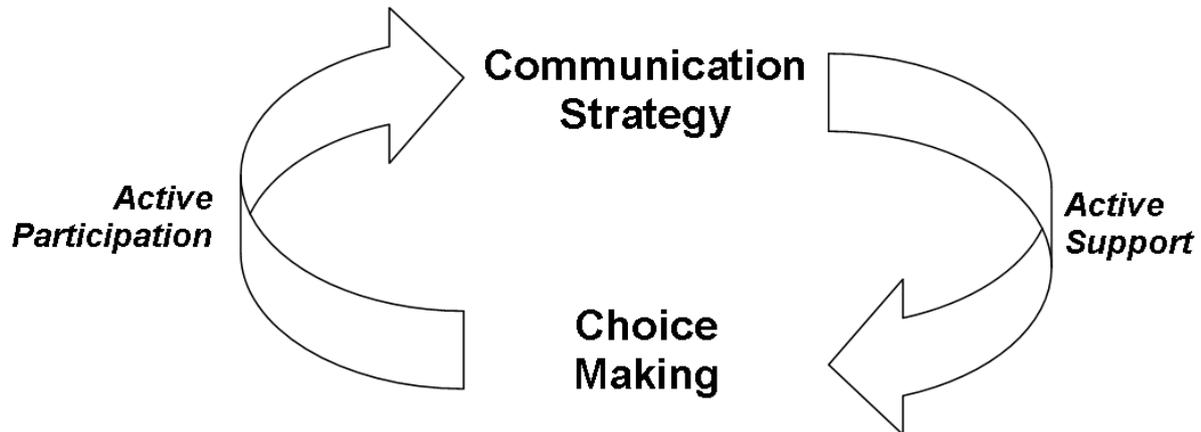
Communication is a basic human right. It is the means by which we are valued by society and ourselves. Our ability to communicate affects our self-esteem, our confidence, our ability to make relationships, our ability to make decisions and our ability to have control over our lives.

Providing opportunities for understanding and expressing choices of realistic and achievable goals for individuals is fundamental. This is all about ensuring people can get their message across and make their wishes known. Communication is often at the root of behaviours that challenge services.

The strategy is a means of organising the different ways of communicating into a "common language" and selecting the best combination for the individual's communication needs. People communicate using eye contact, eye pointing, facial expression, touch, pointing, body language, gestures, signing, objects, photographs, symbols, line drawings as well as through speech and the written word. Many people with learning disabilities communicate without speech or with limited speech and so real choices can be limited if staff and carers are not skilled and trained appropriately.

Effective communication is therefore a gateway to our providing the desired and required support. Empowering support means continuous listening and engagement with service users.

## ELHAP's person centred approach to communication



The communication strategy directs and develops the direct support service users receive, which in turn develops and enhances choice making. Choice making in turn helps to develop service user's participation in the service and in the organisation as a whole.

### What do we want to achieve?

A structured and planned promise to support and improve people's communication, in their lives and at ELHAP, so that they can exercise rights, make choices and have control of their lives.

Embed communication in all our service structures, in organisational structures, and enable ELHAP to become a more responsive organisation to better meet the needs of all our service users.

### Our Expectations

In order to achieve the aims and objectives set out in the Communication Bill of Rights, all ELHAP employees and volunteers are expected to:

1. Adhere to the ASHA Communication Bill of Rights in all situations.
2. Work within John O'Brien's theory of five accomplishments and be aware that communication underpins each of these accomplishments.
3. Attend communication training as directed.
4. Ensure the communication procedures are adhered to.
5. Follow the advice and guidance of the ELHAP Communication Co-ordinator.
6. Seek advice from the ELHAP Communication Co-ordinator as and when required.

### The 5 Dimensions of Inclusion

Based on the work of John O'Brien, <http://thechp.syr.edu/rsa.htm>

#### **1. Contributing**

We all have gifts and capacities. But as John McKnight says "gifts aren't gifts until they are given." Giving our gifts, and using our capacities, are important parts of living a full life.

#### **2. Being someone**

We all want to be noticed, to be valued by others. We want people to notice if we're missing, to want to know our opinions, to see us as equals. We want people to care what we think of them.

#### **3. Belonging**

We all want to belong. To have friends, to be loved, to have people want to have us around. Belonging is about who we want to be around, and who wants us around. It isn't what happens when we learn to cope with having been put with others (because they are seen to be like us). And belonging is about personal, not professional relationships.

#### **4. Sharing ordinary places**

None of us like to be put away, kept apart from the real world. It is in ordinary places that belonging and contributing matter to us. We want to be free, not locked away, or put aside.

#### **5. Choice and control**

We all want to be allowed to strive for our own unique identity and future. We want to have as much power over our destiny as other people, not to have others taking decisions for us – and when we need help we want to be in control of what happens not to be carried along in the current. Our individuality, our personhood, is not made up of just big things but also of our many tiny and seemingly insignificant decisions and preferences.

### **Procedures**

#### **1. Face to face communication**

To facilitate and actively reinforce the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication systems (e.g. Makaton signs, symbols, photos, objects of reference) when people with learning disabilities use little or no speech.

#### **2. Physical Environment**

To facilitate and develop the physical environment so people with learning disabilities can successfully navigate the physical space, including doors, kitchen areas, equipment, resources, staffing etc.

#### **3. Written communication**

Written communication needs to be in an 'easy to read' format.

The question of whether text is 'easy to read and understand' depends very much on the abilities and experience of the reader. Some people can read long documents others will find it difficult.

The concept of 'easy to read' cannot be universal and it will not be possible to write in a way that everybody understands. However, easy to read material is generally characterised by:

- The use of a simple, straight forward language
- The avoidance of technical language, abbreviations and initials
- A clear and logical structure
- Use of certain fonts and size (e.g. Arial font and at least 14pt size)
- Use of symbols and pictures

#### **4. Information technology / resource requirements**

The implementation of this strategy requires the use of Non Standard Software Applications that provide users access to a range of photos and symbols.

It is agreed that in order to facilitate effective communication with people with learning disabilities there is a need for a range of different Non Standard Software Applications enabling users to chose the best possible image/picture on each occasion (e.g. Photosymbols, CHANGE Picture Bank, Writing with symbols)

## 5. Communication Development

ELHAP is often supporting people who may struggle to communicate verbally or through symbols/pictures or who may appear to not be motivated to communicate. In order to develop communication and choice making, we will develop an individual communication plan that focuses on the service user's particular communication needs and abilities (e.g. starting to use objects of references, food choices etc). We **never** assume that a person cannot make choices or communicate – everyone communicates and so everyone makes choices. Instead we strive to facilitate and improve people's communication through a considered and consistent 'communication plan' that utilises the needs and abilities of each service user.

In addition, all staff require regular opportunities for training, reflection, discussion and to review individual communication support. .

This policy works in conjunction with the following other policies:

**Decision Making Policy**  
**Person Centred Support Policy**  
**Positive Risk Taking Policy**