

Communication Boards

An individual may be left unable to verbally communicate for a number of reasons. Having a tube inserted in the throat, having an illness that weakens the voice muscles, having suffered a stroke or other trauma and/or suffering from one of a number of neurological diseases are all reasons that verbal communications skills may be limited. In such cases non-verbal communication replaces speaking, and communication boards are one common tool to help individuals communicate non-verbally. Below are some answers to frequently asked questions about communication boards.

What Are Communication Boards?

Communication boards are both augmentative and alternative communication devices. That means that they are used to supplement or replace spoken language as a means of communication.

How Do Communication Boards Work?

Communication boards usually contain the letters of the alphabet, common words or phrases and pictures of common items and/or actions. Individuals with limited or no verbal communication skills simply point to the letters to spell words or to the pictures to express an idea or desire. Sometimes communication boards are also known as symbol boards, word boards or letter boards.

What Are Communication Boards Made Of?

Communication boards come in a variety of designs. They can be as simple as a laminated piece of paper or as complex as an electronic board with an electronic voice which speaks for the user. Usually communication boards are made from sturdy materials and can withstand being used in a variety of environments.

How Are Communication Boards Obtained?

Many individuals using communication boards had their first board made by family and friends. Purchasing a board from a private company is an option, though those who live in residential care homes are often given them by the home and those who are diagnosed as needing them by the NHS may receive them that way.

What If An Individual Can't Spell?

If an individual can not spell, the alphabet part of a communication board may be removed or ignored. Children, for example, often using communication boards made up of pictures rather than letters.

What If An Individual Can't Move His or Her Hands?

If an individual cannot move his or her hands communication boards can be adapted to suit the individual. For example, spacing items out on the board so that the individual can clearly eye point to them (look at them) or having the individual grasp a pointer between the teeth are both means in which he or she might be able to use a communication board without hands.

Where Are Communication Boards Stored?

Communication boards usually travel with their owners and are not stored out of their reach. Some communication boards may be mounted onto wheelchairs, and some may be in book form. Regardless of the format, an individual's communication board should never be put out of eye sight. Storing a communication board out of its owners reach is essentially robbing its owner of the ability to communicate.

Where Can I Find Further Information About Communication Boards?

A variety of organisations dedicated to supporting individuals affected by speech difficulties and disorders will likely be able to offer further information on communication boards. Afasic (www.afasic.org.uk), Christopher Place, The Speech, Language and Hearing Centre (www.speech-lang.org.uk), Communication Therapy International (www.ctint.co.uk), Speakability (www.speakability.org.uk) and Talking Point (www.talkingpoint.org.uk) are a few such organisations in the United Kingdom.