



Communication and Interaction Framework Guide

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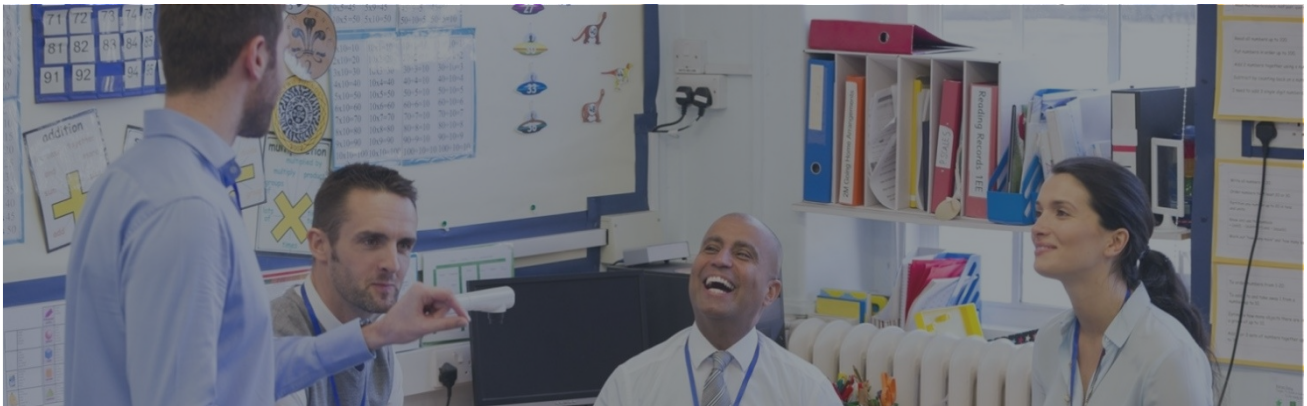


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Introduction

Human communication – like much of the social sciences – is incredibly complex. There are lots of specialist areas and different ways to study it, but for this framework, and for the work you do with your pupils, we're going to keep it simple: **communication is the act of sharing information between two or more people.**

There are so many different ways we can communicate. Broadly, we communicate through two forms – **behavioural** and **symbolic**.

- **Behavioural communication** is when someone acts out their feelings – for example, lashing out when they're angry.
- **Symbolic communication** uses language or other symbols to share a message – like telling someone you're unhappy.

Symbolic communication allows for much more nuance and complexity in what we say, but behavioural communication can still be a very effective (if blunt and often socially unacceptable) way of getting a message across.

When it comes to symbolic communication, the method someone uses often depends on their cognitive, sensory, or physical abilities. Most people share their thoughts and feelings using speech and hearing – what we call the **oral-aural mode**. But if someone can't hear or speak, they might use a **manual-visual mode**, like sign language, to communicate verbally.

It's really important to understand that **verbal communication** simply means using language – no matter how it's expressed. It could be spoken words, sign language, writing, key word signing, using graphic or tactile symbols, or even tactile writing.

When we talk about 'verbal' communication, we're not just talking about speech. That's **oral** (or **vocal**) communication.

In fact, when people say 'non-verbal', they often really mean 'non-vocal'. A pupil who doesn't speak may still be communicating *verbally* through other forms of language.

As a society, we've developed all sorts of technologies to help us record communication – making it more accurate and allowing us to share it over longer distances and periods of time.

In the UK, most people use a **graphophonemic-visual** system – in other words, the **written alphabet** – to record and share communication. But for younger children, or individuals with cognitive or motor difficulties, a simpler system might work better. They might use **ideographic-visual** systems, like **PECS**, which represent whole ideas or concepts, rather than breaking things down into individual letters and sounds.

For individuals with visual impairments, systems based on seeing obviously aren't suitable. Instead, they might use **aural** or **tactile** forms of recorded communication – such as **audio recordings, braille, or tactile symbols** – to express themselves or receive information.

Humans also use loads of **non-verbal** signals every time we communicate – things like facial expressions, gestures, how close we stand to someone, body language, and the tone of our voice. These non-verbal cues help us show or understand emotion and intent.

When we're messaging digitally (texts, emails, chats), these non-verbal signals can be the difference between a full-blown argument and a simple "lol" (Laugh Out Loud)!

Communication goes far beyond just language. We share meaning in lots of ways – through **visual arts**, **performance**, how we **present our work**, and even how we **present ourselves**.

Sometimes these messages are deliberate, but often they're not – yet they still affect how others perceive and understand us.

Communication is a huge and varied field, and depending on an individual's strengths and needs, it can happen in far more ways than just speaking, listening, reading, or writing.

Working with Speech and Language Therapists

When we created our Communication and Interaction framework, we didn't do it alone. We worked closely with a group of **Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs)** who reviewed the framework and shared their advice and expertise. Their feedback helped us adapt and improve it to better meet the needs of schools and their pupils.

Angharad Welch from **Find the Key Speech and Language Therapy** played a big role in this. She provided clear guidance on how schools can use the framework effectively – and how it can strengthen the way schools work alongside their SaLT teams.

We've also recorded a series of **SENDcast podcasts** with Angharad, where we dive deeper into Communication and Interaction. These are a great resource if you want even more practical advice and ideas.

<https://thesendcast.com/category/episodes/angharad-welch/>

Advice from a Speech and Language Therapist

We've asked **Angharad Welch**, Speech and Language Therapist at **Find the Key**, to share her thoughts on how schools can use this framework effectively and improve collaboration with their SaLT teams.

Speech and Language Therapists can sometimes talk a 'different language' to schools and it can be difficult to find common ground for discussions. Below I have identified some ideas for using this framework effectively.

- Use the framework to identify where groups of children in the same class may have overlapping areas of need. This could support you to provide targeted interventions to these children or to evaluate your whole class teaching approaches. Effective universal and targeted teaching approaches mean that Speech and Language Therapists can be more effective when providing or guiding specialist interventions
- You will see that the framework is organised by levels and by age bands. This is likely to be helpful in discussions with your SaLT whose training is focussed on the developmental progression of communication skill. I am delighted that this framework reflects that communication skills, including written skills, cannot be taken as standalone skills, and must build on a foundation of early interaction and language-rich experience. Whilst the curriculum may demand evidence of one skill in a child, the framework allows us to see that there may be many underlying skills needed to reach that goal.
- The communication framework's developmental approach is also likely to be helpful in transition discussions between Early Years settings and Primary schools, or between Primary schools and Secondary schools.
- NB Please use the developmental age bands with wisdom. A child with skills in the three-year-old level at the age of 7 will not present exactly like a three-year-old, because they have been exposed to seven years of experience and may have developed a range of coping strategies. Children have often become adept at using the skills they have to manage the implications of their communication disorder. The age bands are a useful point of reference but need to be shared carefully and thoughtfully, especially as young people get older.
- The framework can be used to support effective referrals into your NHS or independent SaLT. It may also support you in talking to parents about why referrals are needed. As referral criteria can change often and become more stringent to manage demand, an effective referral with strong evidence may be the difference between accessing a SaLT or not.
- Some children will show a delay in communication skills, that is, they are following a typical developmental path, but are not reaching expected goals 'on time'. Other children exhibit the classic 'spiky profile' of disordered communication, with gaps in some earlier areas, but apparent skills in later areas. This framework will allow you to clearly understand this.
- Ask your Speech and Language Therapist if they can help you to identify where their therapy goals will fit in alongside the descriptors in the framework. Communication progress can sometimes be difficult to identify, and shared use of descriptors may allow better recognition of a child's achievements.
- Try using the framework to promote shared target-setting between school, families, and SaLT e.g. at Annual Review.

- A gap in the framework does not imply that a child necessarily needs to work on that area as a target, but it may help you identify and refine developmentally appropriate goals for children. Best practise would be to take advice from a Speech and Language Therapist in developing goals for support, and not simply adapt descriptors into IEP targets.

Children and young people using Augmentative and Alternative Communication tend, intrinsically, to follow a less typical path to communication success. This means that the skills that are delineated in this strand, whilst organised in levels, do not necessarily reflect typical developmental steps, as is the case within the rest of the framework.

Speech and Language Therapists, alongside colleagues from other therapies like Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy, will choose a range of goals for communication and access to AAC that reflect the individual needs of the child and constitute functional goals for them.

I am so pleased that the framework reflects throughout that physical skills are important foundations for communication success. Specifically, physical access to any device and how this is progressed or maintained is as much an issue to be considered as the communication content of any software. This is a true reflection of the complexities of AAC.

Speech and Language Therapists use an approach called 'Total Communication', a philosophy that aims to immerse children and young people in effective communication environments that model communication in a range of modalities e.g. signing, symbols, spoken language. The children then choose the unique blend of methods that work to their strengths and wishes.

For this reason, you may find that your goal setting and assessment using these areas will require you to take a more eclectic approach, as well as a more multi-disciplinary one.

Why Understanding Communication Matters

When teachers have a better understanding of their pupils' communication strengths and needs, they can plan more personalised learning, put the right interventions in place, and have more effective conversations with Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT).

These are areas where the National Curriculum programmes of study often don't naturally provide enough support.

Using the Communication and Interaction Framework with Evisense

The Communication and Interaction framework works seamlessly with our evidence platform, Evisense. Evisense is simple to use, with a social media-style interface that makes uploading and sharing evidence quick and easy.

Because Evisense allows unlimited users, you can give your Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) access at no extra cost. This means SaLTs can contribute directly to a child's story, sharing the progress they're making during their sessions.

Regular communication between the SaLT, parents, teachers, and support staff is really important for a child's development. It helps everyone understand how the pupil is progressing, what the next steps are, and how they can help — whether that's practising sounds, using intensive interaction, singing songs, or other strategies.

In reality, regular communication doesn't always happen. SaLTs might only be in school for a short time, and pupils who travel by school transport can make face-to-face parent meetings tricky.

Evisense can help overcome these challenges.

A SaLT can quickly record a short selfie video, talking through what they worked on in a session and giving tips on how staff and parents can support that learning at school or at home.

Staff and parents can add comments, share successes (or ask for help if things aren't going well), or even record their own videos. This creates a more holistic view of the pupil's development and enables the SaLT to provide even better, more personalised support.

Framework Structure

The Communication and Interaction framework is designed to sit alongside the other frameworks your school already uses to assess Cognition and Learning. Each of our frameworks has its own levelling structure, most are built around the relevant statutory guidance and any other departmental advice that applies, some we have free reign to choose a structure that makes sense in that context.

The image on the next page shows how the Communication and Interaction framework compares to our other frameworks.

Framework Comparison Chart

B SQUARED STANDARD SCORE	B SQUARED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS								P LEVELS AND NC LEVELS (COMPARISON)
	Early Steps (2022)	Engagement Steps	Progression Steps & Preparing for Adulthood	Primary Steps	Steps 4 Life	Autism Progress	SEMH	Communication & Interaction	
15 - 15.5									NC 7
14 - 15			Progression Step 10				SEMH Step 11	Level 16	
13 - 14					Level 2	Level 17			NC 6
12 - 13			Progression Step 9	Greater Depth & Breadth			SEMH Step 10	Level 15	NC 5
11 - 12									
10 - 11			Progression Step 8	Year 6	Level 1	Level 15	SEMH Step 9	Level 14	NC 4
9 - 10				Year 5					NC 3
8 - 9			Progression Step 7	Year 4	Entry 3	Level 14	SEMH Step 8	Level 13	
7 - 8				Year 3					NC 2a
6 - 7			Progression Step 6 (PKS 6)	Year 2	Entry 2	Level 13	SEMH Step 7	Level 12	NC 2c
5 - 6			Progression Step 5 (PKS 5)						NC 1a
			Progression Step 4 (PKS 4)	Year 1	Entry 1	Level 12	SEMH Step 6	Level 11	NC 1b
4 - 5	Early Learning Goals (ELG)		Progression Step 3 (PKS 3)	Primary Step 3	Step 7	Level 11	SEMH Step 5	Level 10	NC 1c
3 - 4	Children in Reception		Progression Step 2 (PKS 2)	Primary Step 2		Level 10	SEMH Step 4	Level 9	P8
2 - 3	3 & 4 year olds								P7
	2½–3 years	Engagement Step 6			Step 6	Level 9	SEMH Step 3	Level 8	P6
	2–2½ years		Progression Step 1 (PKS 1)	Primary Step 1		Level 8		Level 7	P5
1 - 2	18–24 months	Engagement Step 5			Step 5	Level 7	SEMH Step 2	Level 6	P4
	12–18 months					Level 6		Level 5	P3(ii)
0 - 1	9–12 months	Engagement Step 4			Step 4	Level 5	SEMH Step 1	Level 4	P3(i)
	6–9 months					Level 4		Level 3	P2(ii)
	3–6 months	Engagement Step 3			Step 3	Level 3		Level 2	P2(i)
	0–3 months	Engagement Step 2			Step 2	Level 2		Level 1	P1(ii)
		Engagement Step 1			Step 1	Level 1			P1(i)

Framework Content

Our Communication and Interaction framework is designed to help staff assess and monitor the developing communication abilities of the children and young people they work with. By breaking communication down into key areas, the framework makes it easier to spot where support is needed and how best to help.

It focuses on the following areas:

- Speech and Language
- Use of Communication
 - Social Communication
 - Functional Communication
- Total Communication & AAC
 - Use of AAC
 - Access to AAC
- Written Communication
 - Decoding
 - Encoding
 - Phonics Appendix
 - Spelling Appendix
- Non-Verbal Communication
 - Communicating with Faces, Bodies & Sounds
 - Self-Expression

Using the Communication and Interaction Framework with Other Frameworks

The Communication and Interaction framework is designed to work alongside our other frameworks for assessment. When we created it, we carefully included appropriate content from our existing frameworks. This brings several benefits:

- **Pre-populated skills:** When you start using the framework, it will already include any skills a pupil has previously achieved or is working towards.
- **Skills syncing:** As pupils achieve skills within Communication and Interaction, these will automatically update in the other frameworks – and vice versa. This makes it easier for teachers and SaLTs to collaborate.
- **Evidence sharing:** Any evidence or comments linked to shared skills will sync across frameworks, so teachers can easily view evidence uploaded by SaLTs.

This all helps create a **more holistic view of each pupil's progress and achievements**. With each professional being able to view the achievements through their own lens.

Connecting Steps: Simple, Powerful Assessment

All of our frameworks — including Autism Progress — are delivered through **Connecting Steps**, our intuitive online assessment system. Connecting Steps is designed to be **simple to use**, even for staff who are new to assessment or not that tech savvy.

The system uses a clear, user-friendly layout with simple navigation, making it quick to record what a pupil has achieved, and see the next steps.

Teachers, support staff, therapists, and senior leaders can all access the information they need without complex training — Connecting Steps does the hard work behind the scenes, letting you focus on supporting pupils rather than battling software.

Showing Progress in Different Ways

Connecting Steps doesn't just record a single measure of success — it shows **progress in a variety of ways**, helping you see the bigger picture for each pupil. The system tracks:

- **Small steps of progress** — even where full achievement hasn't yet been reached
- **Depth of learning** — If they are working towards achieving a skill, they may have just encountered it, they need physical support or just prompting. If they have achieved the skill, how confident are they and can they apply those skills in different ways?
- **Lateral progress** — showing where pupils are broadening and strengthening their skills within or across different areas
- **Non-linear progress** — recognising that progress is spikey and uneven. Spikes in development can be celebrated, skills that might otherwise be missed.

Whether you're tracking academic milestones, social development, life skills, or communication needs, Connecting Steps gives you the tools to show how every pupil is growing — even when that growth doesn't fit a straight line.

It ensures that **all progress is visible**, celebrated, and used to inform next steps in a meaningful way.

For more information about Connecting Steps or any of our frameworks, please visit the link below, to book a FREE online meeting at a time that works for you.

www.bsquared.co.uk/meeting