

# Communication Boards

Our Communication Boards are designed to make playgroups inclusive and welcoming for all children, including those with disability, developmental delay or communication challenges.

By using picture and symbols for common objects, actions, emotions, and requests, these boards help children express themselves, connect with others, and participate in playgroup activities. They also give families and peers the chance to learn and experience alternative ways of communicating, helping to normalise their use and foster a culture of inclusion.

## Why should we use communication boards?

- **Provide an alternative way to communicate:** children can point to symbols to express their needs, wants, feelings or choices, even if they have limited verbal language.
- **Support language and social development:** by using symbols alongside spoken words, children learn vocabulary, sentence structures, and social communication skills.
- **Encourage participation and inclusion:** children can join in playgroup activities, interact with peers, and make friends.
- **Reduce frustration and anxiety:** children who find verbal communication challenging can express themselves without becoming upset or overwhelmed.
- **Promote independence and choice making:** children can indicate what they want or need, helping them feel in control and confident.
- **Teach empathy and understanding:** all children learn that there are different ways to communicate, normalising non-verbal communication and fostering respect for differences.
- **Support learning and attention:** symbols help children process information, follow routines, and stay engaged in playgroup activities.



## Tips for using the board effectively

- **Keep the board visible and accessible:** Children need to clearly see and reach the symbols to use them confidently.
- **Model communication:** Point to the symbols as you speak. For example, say, *"I want the ball"* while pointing to the corresponding symbols.
- **Encourage independence:** Allow children to point to symbols to express themselves while modelling language gently.
- **Respond to every communication attempt:** Acknowledge and support each effort – praise communication rather than perfection.
- **Be patient:** Give children time to find and point to the right symbols without rushing.
- **Use the boards during play and conversation:** Incorporate them naturally into activities and social moments.
- **Include everyone:** Encourage peers, family members, and others to join in using the board.

## A note on hand-over-hand prompting

Avoid using hand-over-hand prompting (physically guiding a child's hand to point at symbols).

While this might seem helpful, it can:

- Limit a child's ability to make their own choices.
- Undermine their confidence and self-expression.
- Create dependence rather than supporting independent communication
- Be physically intrusive and difficult to fade out.



Instead, use modelling, encouragement, and gentle verbal prompts to support the child's communication at their own pace.