

Comparison of Communication Methods

Method	Description	Pros	Cons	Cost
Real-time Speech	Using natural voice to engage in typical conversation	Quick, can be used almost anywhere	Not possible for all autistics	Free
Gestures	Using commonly understood body movements to convey meaning	Does not require language, Easy to express many simple ideas, can be used almost anywhere where there is light	Limited amount of ideas that can be expressed	Free
Vocalizations	Non-language sounds created with vocal cords	Easy to express many simple ideas, can be used almost anywhere	Limited amount of ideas that can be expressed	Free
Object Exchange	Using objects passed to others to express needs or desires	Does not require language	Communication partner must know the system, Limited amount of ideas that can be expressed	Free to low
Music	Using songs or parts of songs to express emotions, desires, or needs	Does not require language, good for people with excellent auditory memories	Not always recognized as communication, requires a very large music library to express more than a small amount of ideas, Very slow	Low to moderate
Art	Using pictures, sculpture, etc, to express a complex idea	Does not require language, can express things that are very difficult to express with language	Not always recognized as communication, very slow, interpretations may vary	Free to high
Communication Board (non-language based)	A portable collection of pictures, symbols, complete sentences or phrases. The person using this points to the desired message	Does not require language, quick, can be used almost anywhere where there is light	Limited amount of ideas that can be expressed	Free to low
Communication Board (alphabet or language based)	A portable collection of language elements. The person using this points to letters or sentence elements to build a message	Can be used almost anywhere there is light, unlimited number of messages	Requires written language ability in both sender and recipient, slow, requires full concentration of both parties	Free to low
Tantrums and other "behavior"	Often "negative" behavior that communicates problems in the environment	Occurs automatically, can occur in situations where all other forms of communication are impossible	Assumed to be preventable (by the autistic) bad behavior, often not seen as communication	Free (but can have negative consequences)
Pre-composed notes	Notes or instructions written in advance that are handed or shown to the communication partner	Can be used almost anywhere there is light, can eliminate fact-gathering questions by others if facts present in note, helps solve memory problems	Requires literacy for communication partner, must be able to anticipate needed information	Free
E-mail, letters	Semi-formal correspondence used to express needs, concerns, feelings, etc.	Avoids need for real-time communication	Requires literacy on both sides of communication, lower form of communication, requires cooperation of communication partner	Free to low

Method	Description	Pros	Cons	Cost
Internet or Mail Ordering	Avoiding shopping situations through using internet or mail-order	Avoids need for real-time communication	May not be suitable for some purchases	Low (with computer)
Instant Messaging	Interactive computer messaging	Removes non-verbal channel of communication, good for people who have trouble with mechanics of speech	Requires literacy on both sides of communication, not usable for all communication partners, requires both parties to have a computer, can be too fast paced for some	Low (with computer)
Sign Language	Physical language using non-verbals, body movements, and hand positioning	Can be used to avoid CAPD or hearing problems, avoids physical mechanics of speech, can be used almost anywhere with light	Requires language ability and decent motor control, limited number of communication partners, requires real-time communication ability	Free
Interactive Handwriting	Writing messages interactively in conversational format	Avoids problems with speech mechanics, can be used in most fixed environments with light	Requires literacy on both sides of communication, requires real-time communication ability	Low
Portable Synthesizers (non-language based)	Electronic devices that translate symbol or pictures into spoken phrases	Does not require language, quick	Limited amount of ideas that can be expressed, unsuitable for some environments	Moderate
Portable Synthesizers (language based)	Electronic devices that translate words or letters into spoken phrases	Faster than writing for some, usable with people who cannot read, avoids problems with speech mechanics	Requires language ability, unsuitable for some environments, requires real-time communication ability	High
TTY/TDD	Electronic device used to place text telephone calls	Avoids problems with speech mechanics, allows people with hearing problems to participate on telephone calls	Requires both parties to have special equipment or use of a relay service, requires real-time communication ability and literacy	Moderate
Internet Relay	Internet web site used to place text telephone calls via a relay service to voice users	Avoids problems with speech mechanics, allows people with hearing problems to participate on telephone calls	Limited world-wide availability, requires real-time communication ability and literacy	Low (with computer)
Facilitated Communication	Physical support of person communicating by another person to enable motor problems to be overcome	Can be combined with many of the above methods, such as writing or synthesizers, can give people voice who cannot otherwise initiate communication	Controversial, has been some bad facilitation, requires a trained facilitator	Free to high