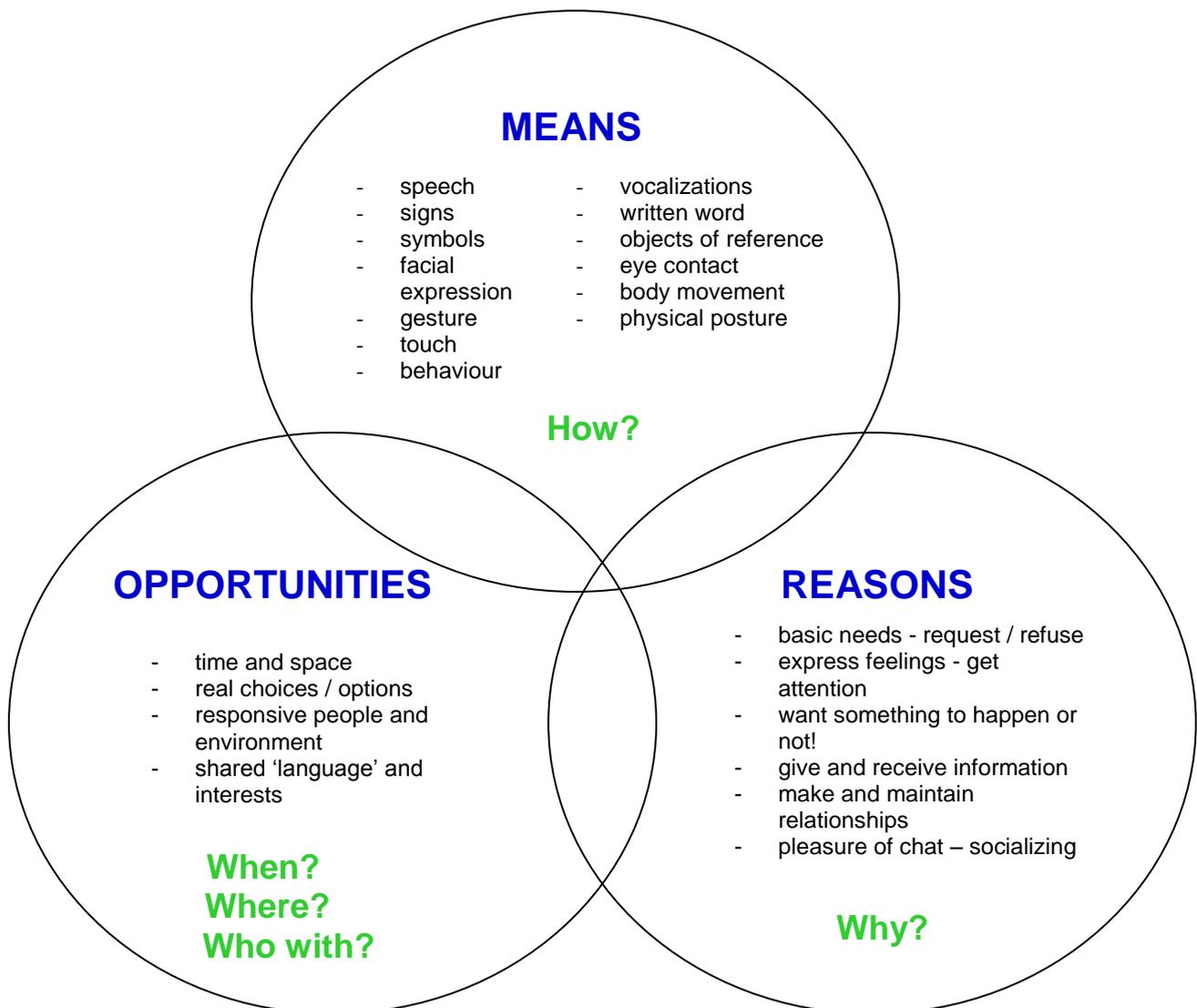


Communication: Means, Reasons and Opportunities

Children and babies learn to communicate when they have a **means**, a way, of communicating, **opportunities** to communicate and **reasons** to communicate. They also need adults who are responsive to how they communicate.



Money,D.(1997) adapted by Leeds SLT Service



Means to communicate

Communication can be verbal, for example, babbling, making noises, saying words and sentences or non-verbal, for example, crying, facial expressions, showing emotions, pointing, signs, gestures, pictures, symbols. It is important for all adults in the child's environment to be aware of the child's preferred method of communication whether it is verbal and/or non-verbal. If you are not sure, please speak to your speech and language therapist for advice. It is important that the child has access to an environment that supports their communication method; for example, staff that are trained in Makaton sign language or the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECs) and/or symbols around the classroom.

Reasons to communicate

We all need a reason to communicate. The first reasons young children usually communicate are being hungry, tired or happy or feeling poorly. Later, they learn to communicate to convey a range of intentions, for example, to make requests, reject, comment or share an interest. They could do this non-verbally and/or verbally, for example by shaking the head and by saying, "No!" Adults can provide lots of reasons to help their child communicate by creating little obstacles and then waiting and looking expectantly for the child to indicate what they need or want: for example by, placing favourite toys out of reach, giving the child a paintbrush but no paints, giving them half of an orange/biscuit or by not filling the glass to the top with milk/water.

Opportunities to communicate

The child needs opportunities to communicate with others in order to develop their communication skills. It is important that adults give the child time to respond to and to initiate interaction. Where possible, try to ensure that others, such as siblings or close peers, do not communicate for the child. Peers may often interpret what a child wants, for example, they may approach the adult to say, 'He wants a drink', which then means that the child's opportunity to communicate has been taken away. Children need access to adults and peers who understand their method of communication and will respond at the correct level.



Examples of how to use Means, Reasons and Opportunities in your everyday communication

- Situation:** The adult has blown some bubbles and has then waited to give the child a chance to respond.

Means: The child usually communicates by reaching for the object he wants but with encouragement he can also give brief eye-contact and vocalise.

Reason: The child wants more bubbles

Opportunities: The child reaches for the bubbles but the adult holds them out of reach and waits a little longer for eye-contact. As soon as the child attempts to communicate by giving eye-contact and vocalising, the adult responds by modelling 'bubbles' and blows the bubbles.
- Situation:** The adult has placed the milk on the table but purposefully not given the child a straw.

Means: The child can communicate non-verbally by pointing and is starting to use a few single words.

Reason: The child is thirsty and she has got her milk but not a straw.

Opportunity: The adult waits for the child to initiate interaction. The child points at her milk and the adult then gives the child a choice: 'Do you want a straw or a plate?', showing the objects. The child points to the straw and the adult gives her the straw, modelling the next step by emphasising the single word '**Straw**, you need a **straw**'. The child is not expected to repeat the word at this stage.
- Situation:** Adult and child have gone outside together and the child is choosing what to play on first.

Means: The child communicates verbally with single words and learnt phrases.

Reason: The child has spotted a favourite activity, the slide, and wants to share her intention to go on it.

Opportunity: The adult is bent down at the child's level, watching her and giving her a chance to communicate. The child points to the slide and says 'up'. The adult prompts a little more language by saying, "Up the.....?" and the child says "slide". If the adult had said, "Do you want to go on the slide first and then go on the swing?" this sentence would have been too long and the child may not have understood it. Later, the adult uses the child's play to model more two word phrases, '**Up** (the) **steps!**' as the child climbs, and "**Whee! Down** (the) **slide!**" as the child slides down.



4. **Situation:** Adult and child are playing alongside each other with the train set.
Means: The child is starting to try to copy sounds and to use specific sounds in play
Reason: Sharing knowledge, interest and pleasure and hoping to get a response.
Opportunity: During play the adult does not ask questions but watches and listens to the child. The child then makes a noise like 'ch' for the train and looks up at the adult. The adult listens and when the child makes eye-contact copies 'ch, ch' and adds " **train**". The child is not asked to repeat at this stage. If the adult had modelled a sentence such as, "The train is going fast on the train track" this sentence would be too long for the child to understand and attempt to copy.
5. **Situation:** The child sees another child drawing a picture
Means: The child can use a variety of Makaton signs, often vocalising at the same time.
Reason: The child wants to draw a picture.
Opportunity: The child vocalises and makes the sign for 'pencil'. The adult understands Makaton sign language and goes with the child to get a pencil, modelling the next step: a two sign combination, alongside speech '(You) **want** a **pencil**?' The adult then waits for the child to request paper and the child does so, using gaze, eye-contact and vocalisation. The adult responds by saying and signing "**paper**". The adult then comments on the child's intention, in a simple way, using sign and speech '(you're going to) **draw** a **picture**.'

