Using a Total Communication Approach

What is Total Communication?

- A **Total Communication Approach** involves using and accepting all types of communication, not just speech, equally.
- This includes facial expressions, body language, gestures, signs, sounds, symbols, written language, pictures, real objects, mini objects, partial objects and/or Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC). **See below for examples!**
- Using this approach can increase communicative interactions with your child when their words have not yet developed or when they have few words. It can be a powerful tool for helping your child get their needs met and can reduce frustration.

Using Total Communication at Home with Your Child:

- **Use the communication mode that suits your child best.** Try a few different modes and see what your child prefers.
- **You can also use multiple modes together**. For example, if your child takes you by hand to the fridge to ask for food, try showing them pictures of what is available in the fridge once you are there.
- **Start small.** Choose 1-3 signs/gestures/pictures to teach your child when you start.
- **Always *model, model, model* without expectation.** Modelling is when we show our child what we want them to do. A child learns best when given multiple opportunities to see a model.
  - Start by modelling around a highly motivating activity/toy/snack. When your child indicates that he/she wants something, interpret for them by 1) saying what you think they might be asking, and then 2) modelling communication (e.g., pointing to the picture, doing the gesture, showing the object).
  - For example, if your child wants more bubbles, you can say, "more bubbles" while doing the sign for 'more'.

Using Gestures and Signs:

- Using gestures/signs is an effective way of communicating because your child only needs their hands or body!
- They may pull you to something they want or push away something to show they don't want it.
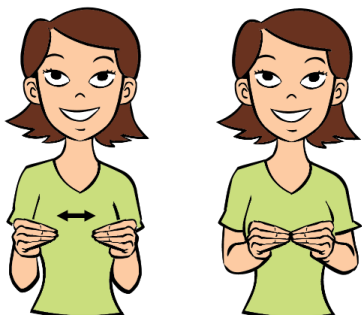- You can also model signs from American Sign Language (ASL).

Image source:
https://babysignlanguage.com/dictionary/more/

Using Real Objects:

- *Objects of reference* are any objects in daily life that can be used to represent something else.

- We all use objects of reference in everyday life as quick way to communicate a message. For example, pointing to a cup to indicate that you would like a drink.

- You may already be using this approach with your child. Maybe your child hands you a spoon to ask for yogurt, or the remote control for their favourite show.

- Examples of objects you could use:
  - **Real objects/items:** Towel for bath time; bowl for dinner; shoe for outdoor time;
  - **Parts of objects:** A label/wrapper from a favourite treat or snack; a puzzle piece for a favourite puzzle;
  - **Miniature items/mini toy items:** a miniature toilet from a doll house to indicate the bathroom, a toy swing to indicate going to the garden, or a fork to indicate dinner. Please be mindful that small items could pose a choking hazard.

- It is important to set up your home environment to support using objects as much as possible.
  - For example, try to keep all the objects together in a small container/ziplock bag, or stick them on a board with velcro, glue, or tape.

Image sources:
https://theautismhelper.com/10-types-visual-student-schedules/
https://www.reddit.com/r/slp/comments/11uwvjc/got_my_first_kid_with_cvi_learning_all_about/

Using Visuals, Pictures, or Choice Boards:
- Pictures can be used in many ways to help your child communicate, including:
    - On a **visual schedule** – to show what is happening throughout the day
    - On a **choice board** – to show your child what is available in the moment (e.g., their favourite foods, toys, activities, etc.)
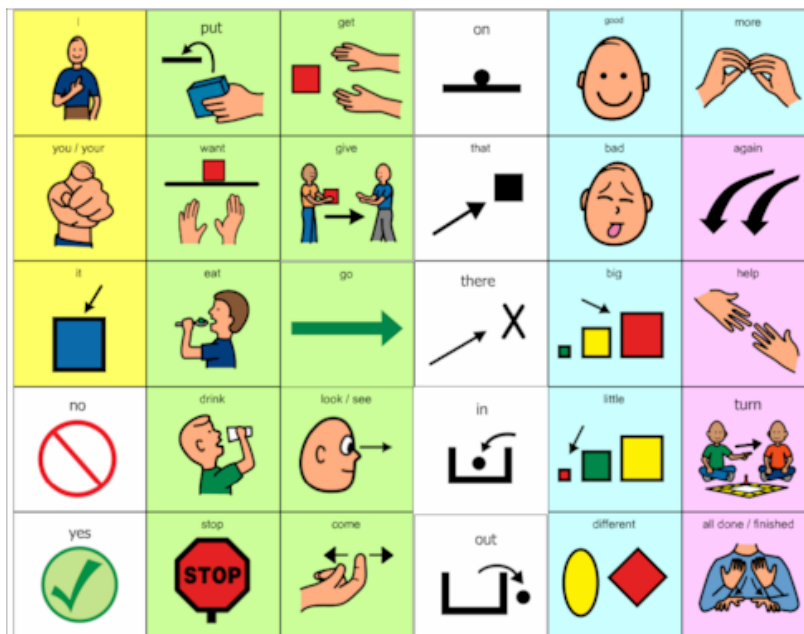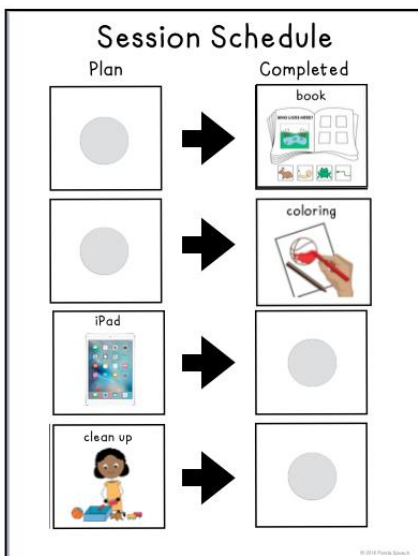   - On a **core board** – to show commonly used words

Image sources:
https://atlspeechtherapy.com/use-visual-schedules-modify-behaviors/
https://www.erinoakkids.ca/getmedia/3c701adc-46a1-4f4e-9813-5ff6121fff65/000103-AODA-Choice-Boards.pdf
https://myboardmaker.com/Activity/23612350