

# ALABAMA SPECIAL EDUCATION PARTICIPANT'S ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

**Supporting Communication of Students  
with Significant Cognitive Disabilities**



**PUBLIC**<sup>™</sup>  
CONSULTING GROUP



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## Session Objectives

(Slide 2)

Participants will...

- Describe the importance of teaching and recognizing communication skills in students in order to increase independence and access to academics.
- Describe the connection between behavior and communication.
- Identify strategies and best practices for increasing student communication skills.

## Engagement Tools

(Slide 4)



Engagement  
Guide



Discussion



Resource



Poll

# Join PollEverywhere

(Slide 5)

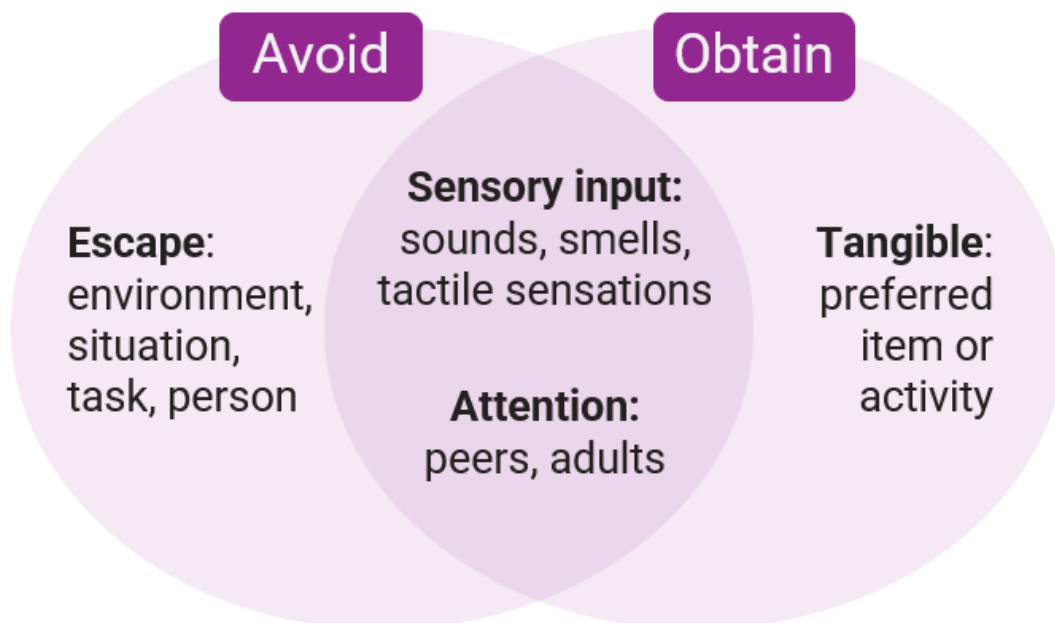
 Text **ASHLEYQUICK663** to **22333** once to join

## Common Methods of Communication

(Slide 9)

- What are common methods or modes of communication?
- What are the methods you personally use most often?
- What methods are most frequently used in your classroom?

Slide 18



\* **Medical:** allergies, change in medication, etc.

# Scenario

(Slide 23)

**Example:** James has a significant cognitive disability and is non-speaking. Teachers report concerns about his aggressive behavior toward staff and other students. He was referred to a clinical psychologist and a functional analysis of his behavior was conducted. ABC charts revealed that triggers to his behavior included being asked to share the bean bag chair with other students or to complete a nonpreferred task such as joining a whole group lesson. When such demands were made, he shouted and screamed at staff, threw objects, and pushed and hit staff and other students. Staff responded to his behavior by allowing him to use the bean bag chair on his own and allowing him to escape the whole group lesson. It was noted that his behavior was worse after an epileptic seizure or if he had not been sleeping well at night. A hypothesis was developed that the function of his behavior was to avoid or escape demands and that staff was reinforcing the behavior by allowing him to avoid tasks. A positive behavior support plan was developed whereby he was taught to hold up a card to indicate that it was his turn to use the bean bag chair and he would then wait for his turn. If he used the card instead of becoming aggressive, he was praised and rewarded with a preferred item to hold while he sat in the bean bag chair.

- What is his behavior telling us?
- What could we do differently to address this behavior (and the function behind it)?

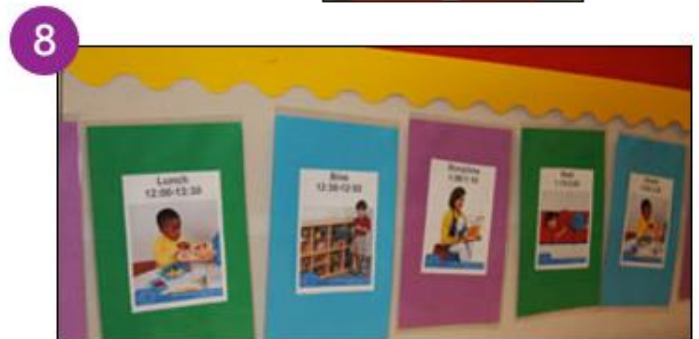
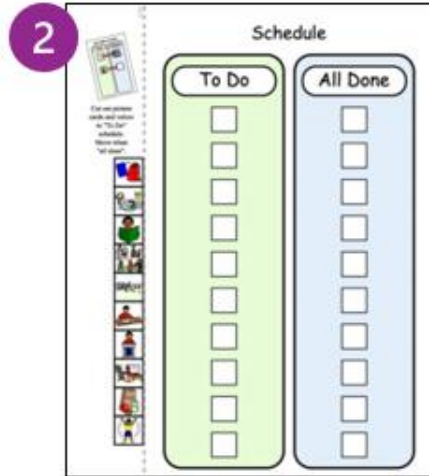
# The Critical Role of Wait Time

(Slide 26)

- Where do you excel with this strategy?
- Where could you apply wait time more often in the classroom?
- In what ways can you share this strategy with your colleagues, such as paraprofessionals?

# Visual Schedule: Examples

(Slides 29 and 30)



1

A simple example of what a class visual schedule might look like. Pairs words and images. Printed on one sheet but more difficult to adjust in the moment.

2

The small icons on the left of the image would be cut up, attached with Velcro, and arranged in order on the To Do side. As each step or task is completed, the student can move the icon to the All Done side. Velcro allows for flexibility to make schedule adjustments. Notice there are only images (not paired with words).

3

This schedule is printed on one sheet and laminated so the student can check off as each task is completed. It is reusable but is difficult to make schedule adjustments in the moment.

4

Pairs visuals with words. Velcro icons allow the student to remove each icon when completed and move it to a Done location. (Sometimes the Done location might be a small basket physically located where the task takes place, e.g., preschooler arrives and checks schedule, hangs up their backpack, and then removes the icon and places it in a basket above their cubby).

5

This is an individual student's schedule hung up alongside other students' schedules. Velcro icons for each activity throughout the day can be removed as tasks are completed. This also allows for flexibility and schedule changes rather than relying on a printed piece of paper.

6

Some students will require their schedule to feature physical objects that represent each activity. This image also shows a strategy for teaching core vocabulary, which we'll talk more about in just a bit.

7

In this example, the flaps can be attached with Velcro over the icons to only reveal one icon at a time. This can be helpful for students who might feel overwhelmed by looking at multiple icons at the same time.

8

This example uses the word for each activity along with the timeframe and actual photos of the task being completed.

# Reflect: Visual Cues and Supports

(Slide 32)

- Where do you excel with this strategy?
- In what ways can you share this strategy with your colleagues, such as paraprofessionals?

# Strategies to Support Student Understanding

(Slide 35)

- **Provide opportunities** to hear the same words, associated with the same situations, over and over again.
- Be **face-to-face** when speaking with your student.
- Use **gestures, objects, or pictures** with your words (e.g., pat a chair when saying “Sit down”).
- **Name what your student is doing** or interested in (e.g., say “Sarah is painting” while she is painting).
- Speak **slowly and clearly** using a **few consistent words**.
- **Emphasize** the important words (e.g., “want book”).
- **Name what is in the environment** (e.g., saying “bus” when a bus is going by).

# Strategies for Supporting Communication Through Language

(Slide 36)

- Give plenty of time to respond; ask once and then wait. (“The anticipation that something should be happening—and does not—may cue the student to initiate the interaction.” Downing et al., 2015)
- Interpret what the student is trying to say:
  - If the student says “uh-oh” while pointing to something that dropped, tell them, “It fell down.”
- Offer choices:
  - “Do you want blue or red?”
- Add to what the student says to you:
  - If the student says “man,” respond by saying, “tall man.”
- Encourage the student to finish your sentence by leaving out last word:
  - “We’re going to the cafeteria to \_\_\_\_.”
- Respond to the student’s attempts to communicate by commenting on what they say:
  - “It sounds like you need help. Can you tell me more about that?”

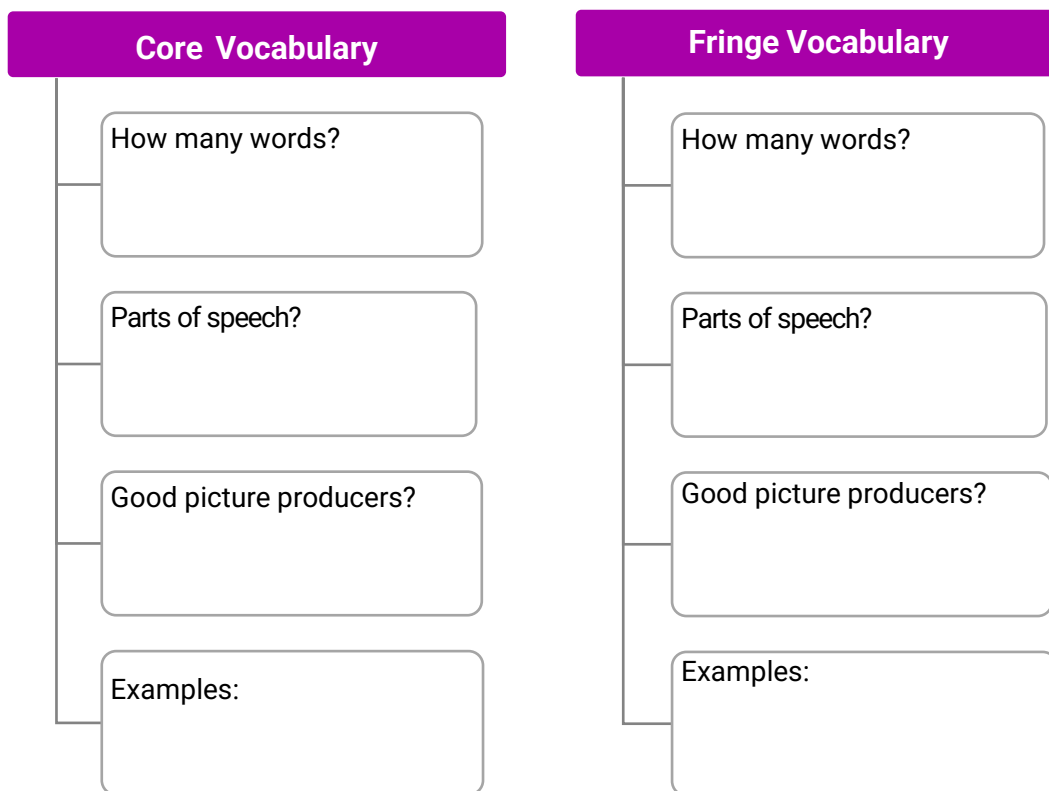
# Communication Dictionary: Scenario

(Slide 38)

It is math time in Ms. Harris’s fourth-grade class. All of the students are working in pairs on various worksheets. Marv, a student with autism, and his partner Fred are working together. Marv is learning to use a calculator to compute the answers, whereas Fred is working through the equations with pencil and paper. After working for about 5 minutes, Marv dashes to the door of the classroom and loudly vocalizes. Ms. Harris asks him to be seated, but he persists, increasing the volume of his sounds. Ms. Harris asks him to be seated again, but Marv falls to the floor, kicking and yelling loudly. Finally, after yelling for almost 10 minutes, Marv calms down, walks back to his desk, and continues with his math. Ms. Harris comments to a colleague during lunchtime, “Marv had another episode today, this time during math class. I wish I could figure out what he is trying to tell me when he runs to the door and yells like that.”

## Core Vocabulary

(Slide 41)





# Top 50 Core Vocabulary Words

(Slide 44)

Word	Category
all done / finished	adjective
all gone / gone	adjective
bad	adjective
different	adjective
good	adjective
more	adjective
what	interrogative
not / don't	negation
that	noun / determiner
this	noun / determiner
I / (name)	pronoun
it	pronoun
you / your	pronoun
again	time / adverb
ready	time / adverb
do / does / did	verb
help	verb
look / see	verb
stop	verb
want	verb
big	adjective
little	adjective
away	place / adverb
come	verb
drink	verb

Word	Category
eat	verb
get	verb
give	verb
go	verb
like	verb
happy	adjective
sad	adjective
sick	adjective
silly	adjective
how	interrogative
when	interrogative
where	interrogative
who	interrogative
trouble	noun
here	place / adverb
there	place / adverb
me / myself	pronoun
my / mine	pronoun
now / time	time / adverb
hear / listen	verb
make	verb
put	verb
say / tell	verb
take	verb
turn	verb

## Other Considerations:

- Color words (red, yellow, blue, etc.)
- Numbers / letters of the alphabet
- Social words/phrases (hi, sorry, please, etc.)