

Finding Their Voice

**A Guide to Empowering
Children Through
Functional
Communication**



It Starts with a Single Request.

One moment stands out vividly: when five-year-old Sophie, who had barely communicated before, used her picture card to request her favourite teddy for the first time. Her mum's tears of joy reminded me why functional communication matters so deeply.



The Goal Isn't Perfection. It's Connection.

Functional communication extends far beyond perfectly pronounced words. It's about empowering children to express their needs, desires, and thoughts effectively.

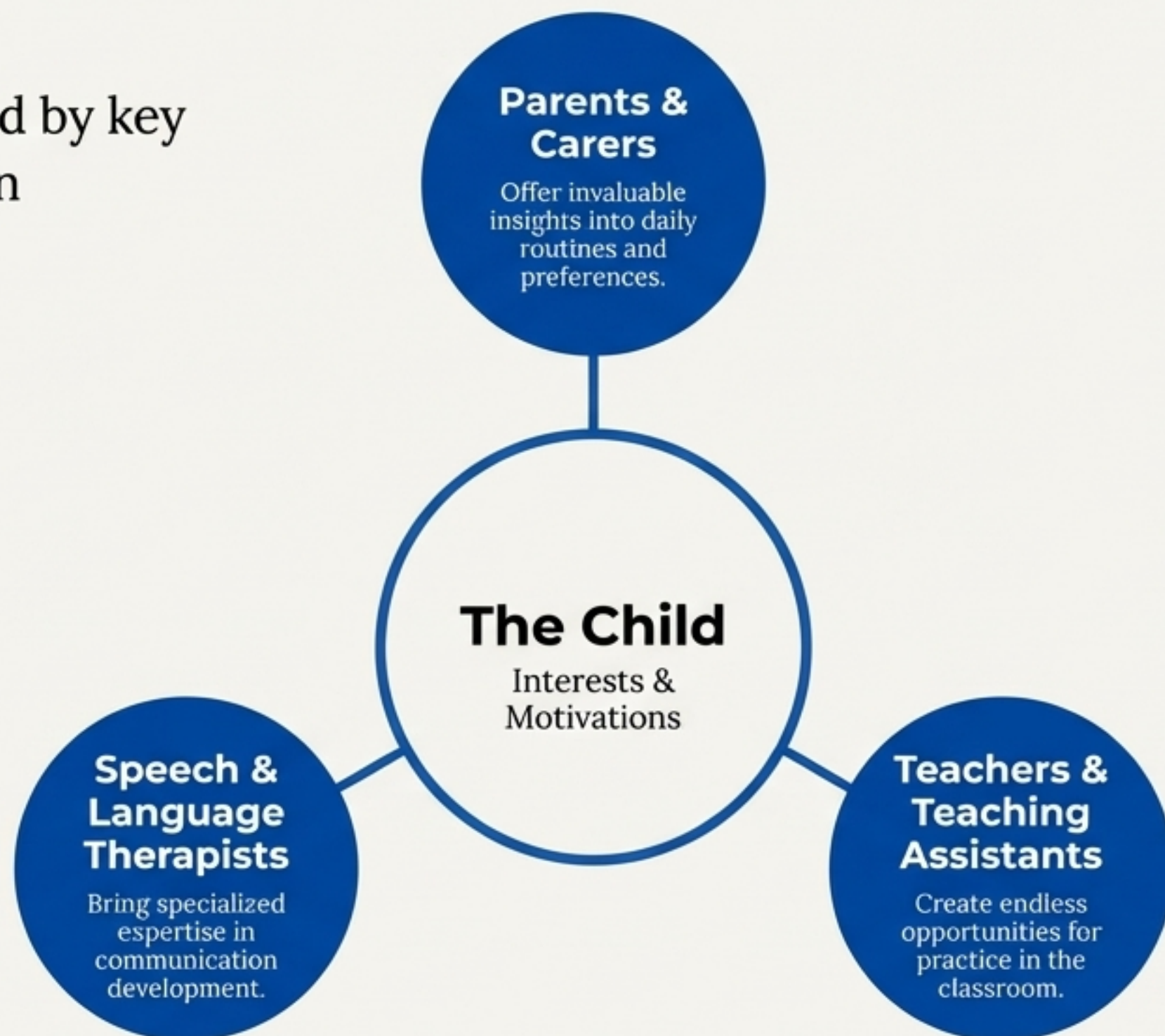
“When we shift our focus from perfect articulation to meaningful **interaction, we open doors to genuine **connection**.”**

Communication That Serves a Purpose



The Communication Team is Built Around the Child

The path to effective communication is guided by key players, each bringing an essential contribution.



Thomas struggled with traditional speech but flourished with a tablet-based system, soon ordering his own meals and telling his sister about his day.

You Are the Expert

“Parents and carers are the true experts in their child’s life.”

Your insights allow strategies to be integrated naturally into everyday life, making communication goals achievable and more personalised.

A Personalized Blueprint for Communication

Follow Their Lead

Center the journey on what captivates the child to create ownership and enthusiasm.

When seven-year-old Mia developed a fascination with cooking, her vocabulary was built around kitchen activities, making learning both relevant and exciting.

Choose the Right Tools

Every child needs their own communication toolkit. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.



Picture cards



Sign language



Speech-generating devices



Traditional speech

Design a Communication-Rich World

Build a Meaningful Vocabulary

Start with words that give immediate control over their environment.

With four-year-old James, we began with “more,” “help,” and “finished.”

Adapt the Environment

- Label items around the house.
- Keep communication tools easily accessible.
- Create predictable routines.
- Use visual schedules for daily activities.

Practice in Daily Life

- Pause familiar routines to create opportunities.
- Wait expectantly for communication attempts.
- Model the use of communication tools throughout the day.

Confidence Grows Through Success.

Deliberately creating situations where children can experience immediate communication victories builds their motivation and willingness to try again.

“Success should be almost guaranteed. The goal isn’t to frustrate but to create natural, motivating opportunities.”



Quick Win: Playful Problems & Structured Choices



The “Sabotage” Strategy

Create playful problems that need solving.

- Give a yoghurt without a spoon.
- Put a toy in a container that’s hard to open.

Jamie loved bubbles. We held the wand ready but waited for any communication attempt—even eye contact—before blowing. This evolved from a look, to the sign for “more,” to eventually saying “bubble.”



Structured Choice-Making

Naturally encourage communication while ensuring success is likely.

- Place two favorite snacks in clear containers.
- Offer two activity choices with pictures.

Quick Win: Small Steps & Motivating Gaps



Breaking Down Activities

Take familiar routines and break them into smaller steps where success is guaranteed.

Maya loved drawing. Instead of giving her all the crayons, we kept them nearby. She only needed to point or make eye contact to receive each colour, building her confidence until she began using words.



The 'Just Out of Reach' Technique

Create a motivating reason to communicate by placing desired items where they are visible but require help.

Lucy loved balloons. We held the uninflated balloon, waiting for a gesture before blowing. This developed from a reach, to the sign for 'more,' to approximating the word 'blow.'

The Guiding Principles of a Quick Win.



The Breakthrough is a Journey of Small Steps

Patience is crucial. Success isn't always immediate, but every small attempt is a victory that builds confidence over time.

Oliver's Story: Oliver took three months to use his first intentional gesture. His parents were worried, but we celebrated each small step—the eye contact, the reaching, the pointing. We showed him the value in communicating. Now, two years later, he communicates confidently using a combination of speech and signs.



The Destination: A Confident Communicator

Supporting functional communication isn't just about teaching skills – it's about opening windows to connection and understanding.

**To empower every child to
engage with the world on
their own terms.**

The Building Blocks of Connection



When we shift our focus to meaningful interaction, we provide children with the foundation they need to build a lifetime of connection.