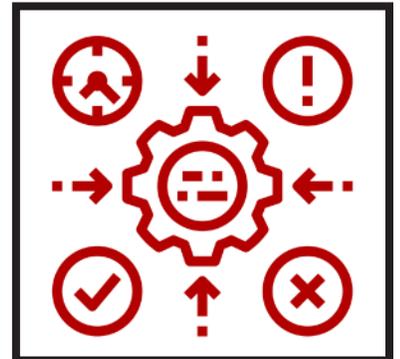




The Setting Matters

When a person is trying to communicate, we need consider the setting. People communicate in context. Where is the person? Who are they talking with? What time of day is it? This all impacts how we communicate.



What a person says can have different meanings depending on the setting. The context provides additional meaning to the conversation. The listener can use the setting to help decode the message.

Settings or context include: environment, partner, time of day, feelings or emotions and even history.

When someone is not able to speak, context is helpful to understand them. This is especially significant if the person doesn't use symbols. If they rely on facial expressions, body language, and gestures, we need to know the context. When someone rubs their stomach in the kitchen, it probably means one thing. If they are in bed, it might mean something else. The same gesture could mean "I'm hungry" or "I feel sick". The environment is an important part of the message.

In the example above, context referred to the place. Context or setting may also be the time of day. For example, a person who uses picture board was at a meeting at 5:00. He had been there a while. He saw someone walking to the elevator. He pointed to "home". Because of the time of day, he could mean

"I want to go home" or "Are you going home?" When asked "who?" he pointed to the person at the elevator. The time of day helped the message.

Who is the person talking with? This may also provide context clues. For example, imagine a person makes a happy "eee" sound. If he says it to his brother, maybe it means "tickle me". If he says the same thing to his friend, it might mean "let's go fast". The partner can be a critical clue to understanding.

The combination of these factors may influence the interpretation of the message.

Even when a person uses language to communicate, context still matters. For someone who uses AAC, it takes time and skill to create a long message. It can be much easier to say one or two words. We may still need context to fully understand. The word "stop" might mean one thing on a long road trip. It can mean something different if the person is scared.

If you want to fully understand what anyone is saying, consider context. It can make the difference between confusion and "getting" the message.