



# What Is Working Now? Functional Communication

It is the way people usually get their point across. It is the effective and useful way they tell us things. How do you know what they want, need or feel?



### Functional Communication

- Anything that helps get the point across
- Can be intentional—means something specific, such as someone pointing to a cookie or saying “I need to use the bathroom”
- Can be unintended that we understand –means something specific, such as crying to signal pain
- Best understood by familiar communication partners

### Familiar Communication Partners

- Best understand functional communication
- Often those comfortable with functional communication
- Can help others understand by sharing a communication dictionary describing what communication behaviors

### Functional Communication Types and Behaviors

- Speech attempts, sounds, body language, facial expressions, and gestures may, or may not, start as American Sign Language (ASL). Many people with

complex communication needs cannot use exact signs so they adapt— using their hands as best they can.

- May mean something different at different times— they are hungry, want to watch TV, or are tired— depending on the hour. Someone familiar with the person knows **what these behaviors mean**.

### Functional Communication doesn't work when:

- Someone melts down and becomes really upset
- In a new situation
- With unfamiliar people
- Need something not in their typical routine
- They can't communicate what they are feeling

### Consider augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)

- If communication breaks down repeatedly
- If they do not have a way to communicate wants, needs, feelings, and thoughts understandably
- To help them communicate with a wider range of people—they are not limited to their best known partners and can talk to anyone.