

Severe and Multiple Disabilities Constituent Committee Monthly Message

The DCDD Board members prepare briefs about topics of interest for our members. As a DCDD member, you are receiving this brief on the topic of resources for professionals who work with students who have communication disorders and/or who are deaf or hard of hearing. We appreciate your continued membership with DCDD! Please feel free to discuss this article on DCDD [Linkedin](#) or [Twitter](#).

This monthly message is the twelfth in a series about the *Communication Bill of Rights*. The list of 15 communication rights and guidelines for professional practice can be found in this article:

Brady, N. C., Bruce, S., Goldman, A., Erickson, K., Mineo, B., Ogletree, B. T., Paul, D., Ronski, M., Sevcik, R., Siegel, E., Schoonover, J., Snell, M., Sylvester, L., & Wilkinson, K. (2016). Communication services and supports for individuals with severe disabilities: Guidance for assessment and intervention. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 121*(2), 121-138.

This month we will focus on the 12th communication right:

The right to access environmental contexts, interactions, and opportunities that promote participation as full communication partners with other people, including peers

Key Points

- ❖ Engagement in shared activities is central to promoting peer communication.
- ❖ Carefully plan the role of paraprofessionals in supporting access and engagement and consider their impact on peer communication.
- ❖ Many students with severe disabilities have visual impairments or hearing loss. We must consider the impact of their vision and/or hearing loss and follow the suggestions of the Teacher Consultant of Students with Visual Impairments and the Teacher of Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing.

- ❖ Ensure that all adaptive equipment and assistive technologies are in good working order and that children are maximizing their use-to support access and engagement with others across environments.
- ❖ Do “places” maps to determine which environments individuals with severe disabilities are participating in and to inspire discussion about new potential environments that could enrich their lives.
- ❖ Provide information about the current environment to students who may not access this information. This is especially important for students who have visually impairments, hearing loss, or mobility challenges mobility challenges.
- ❖ Teach peers what they need to know to interact with the student with disabilities.
- ❖ Work on social skills and specifically the skills of friendship.
- ❖ Assess each environment to determine what the student will require to be a full participant. This includes the type of messages expressed in that environment and how to teach the student the appropriate vocabulary.

Select Resources Specific to Individuals with Severe Disabilities

Carter, E. W., Huber, H. B. & Biggs, E. E. (2015). The importance of peers as communication partners. In J. E. Downing, A. Hanreddy, & K. D. Peckham-Hardin (Eds.). *Teaching communication skills to students with severe disabilities*. Third edition. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

See also the many articles and studies by Marleen Janssen and others on the topic of coaching communication partners.

I’m sure you have many additional ideas. Please share your thoughts.

Please join us on Twitter or Linked In to share your ideas about this 11th communication right.

Susan M. Bruce
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