Communication Portfolios
a voice for children with complex communication needs

Georgia Sensory Assistance Project
What is GSAP?

- Funded through the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs
- Housed at the University of Georgia
- Provides technical assistance to families, teachers, and service providers of children and youth with deaf-blindness (birth-21 years)
- Part of a network of state deaf-blind projects connected by the National Center on Deaf-Blindness.
Georgia PINES & GSAP

- GSAP works closely with Georgia PINES to meet the needs of young children (birth-3 years) with deaf-blindness and their families and service providers.

- GSAP staff and Georgia PINES Parent Advisors are working together to assist families in creating Communication Portfolios for their children.
What is a Communication Portfolio?

- an organized, portable, easily-used notebook
- describes (with words and pictures) each child’s unique ways of communicating his/her wants, needs, and preferences
Why do we need to communicate?

“Without communication we become isolated from our fellow human beings and cannot form meaningful relationships.”  
B. Miles & M. Riggio, 1999

Through communication, children can make changes in their world. They can express their wants and needs. They can make choices.  
Kathleen Stremel, 2004

“...communication is the basis of all other skills and for interaction between student... and all others”  
Hand In Hand, AFB Press, 1995
What is Communication?

- **Interaction** – turn taking, listening, responding to one another

- **Forms of Communication** – vocalizations, gestures, changes in body movements, facial expressions

- **Purpose** - sharing information, getting something you want, rejecting items/activities you don’t want, socializing, having fun
What if you communicate and no one listens?

- What if you aren’t aware that communication is going on around you?
- What if no one understands when you are trying to communicate?
- What if you can’t communicate in the ways people around you do?
Young children with sensory impairments (or other significant disabilities) often face challenges developing communication. They may use facial expressions, body movements, gestures, vocalizations, or signs that caregivers must interpret. Unfamiliar people may have difficulty in understanding the child’s attempts to communicate.
Families have valuable information to share about their child

Through their close relationship, parents...

- typically learn to interpret and understand their child’s unique ways of expressing his/her wants, needs, and preferences
- typically use consistent words or other cues during routines to let their child know what to expect
Steps to create a Communication Portfolio

- complete a communication assessment
- gather and/or take pictures of the child using his/her communication skills
- organize the information and put into the notebook
Dr. Rowland talks about the Communication Matrix

http://safeshare.tv/w/QXhrzYDnCt
## Communication Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons (Why)</th>
<th>Behaviors (How)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refuse</td>
<td>Body Movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain</td>
<td>Facial Expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Eye gaze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocalizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of Symbols</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Handbook: Online Communication Matrix (www.communicationmatrix.org)
Dr. Rowland talks about Families

http://safeshare.tv/w/KcfqEYYYmAw
Collaborating with Families

- Understanding and interpreting their child’s behaviors or gestures as communication (part of assessment process)
- Gathering and taking pictures of child
- Sharing this information with professionals
Using the Communication Portfolio

- To support transition from early intervention to school or from one classroom to another
- To assist multiple caregivers in getting to know the child
- To promote consistency of communication strategies used across settings (home, school, community)

...any time is a great time!
A Parent’s Perspective on Sharing Information

http://safeshare.tv/w/RxRbrWYmYf
Sharing the Communication Portfolio

- Extended family
- Nursing staff
- Education team
- Child care providers
- Extra-curricular activities, camps
- Private therapists
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