

Seven Levels of Communication in the Communication Matrix

Level I. Pre-Intentional Behavior - Behavior is not under the individual's own control, but lets you know if he is comfortable, uncomfortable, hungry or sleepy. Caregivers interpret the child's feelings from behaviors such as body movements, facial expressions and sounds. In typically developing children, this stage occurs between 0 and 3 months of age.

Level II. Intentional Behavior – The child has control of behaviors, but doesn't use it to communicate intentionally. Individuals at this stage do not yet realize that they can use these behaviors to control another person's behavior. Caregivers interpret the individual's needs and desires from behaviors such as body movements, facial expressions, vocalizations and eye gaze. In typically developing children, this stage occurs between 3 and 8 months of age.

Level III. Unconventional Communication (pre-symbolic) - Unconventional pre-symbolic behaviors are used intentionally to communicate. Communicative behaviors are "pre-symbolic" because they do not involve any sort of symbol; and they are "unconventional" because they are not socially acceptable for us to use as we grow older. Communicative behaviors include body movements, vocalizations, facial expressions and simple gestures (such as tugging on people). In typically developing children, this stage occurs between 6 and 12 months of age.

Level IV. Conventional Communication (pre-symbolic) - Conventional pre-symbolic behaviors are used intentionally to communicate. Communicative behaviors are "pre-symbolic" because they do not involve any sort of symbol; they are "conventional" because they are socially acceptable and we continue to use them to accompany our language as we mature. The meanings of some gestures may be unique to the culture in which they are used. Communicative behaviors include pointing, nodding or shaking the head, waving, hugging, and looking from a person to a desired object. Note that many of these gestures (and especially pointing) require good visual skills and may not be useful for individuals with severe vision impairment. Some vocal intonations may also be used at this stage. In typically developing children, this stage occurs between 12 and 18 months of age.

Level V. Concrete Symbols - "Concrete" symbols that physically resemble what they represent, are used to communicate. Concrete symbols look like, feel like, move like, or sound like what they represent. Concrete symbols include pictures, objects (such as a shoelace to represent "shoe"), "iconic" gestures (such as patting a chair to say "sit down") and sounds (such as making a buzzing sound to mean "bee"). Most individuals skip this stage and go directly to Level VI. For some individuals concrete symbols may be the only type of symbol that makes sense to them; for others they may serve as a bridge to using abstract symbols. Typically developing children use concrete symbols in conjunction with gestures and words, generally between 12 and 24 months of age, but not as a separate stage.

Level VI. Abstract Symbols - Abstract symbols such as speech, manual signs, brailled or printed words are used to communicate. These symbols are "abstract" because they are NOT physically similar to what they represent. They are used one at a time. In typically developing children, this stage occurs between 12 and 24 months of age.

Level VII. Language - Symbols (concrete or abstract) are combined into two- or three-symbol combinations ("want juice", "me go out"), according to grammatical rules. The individual understands that the meaning of symbol combinations may differ depending upon how the symbols are ordered. In typically developing children, this stage begins around 24 months of age.

	OBTAIN							SOCIAL							INFORMATION		
I Pre-intentional Behavior Body movements Early sounds Facial expressions	A1	Expresses Comfort							Expresses Interest in Other People								
	B1	B2	B3					B4									
II Intentional Behavior Body movements Early sounds Facial expressions Vocal behavior	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13	C14	C15	C16	C17
	Refuses, Rejects III	Requests More Action III	Requests New Action III	Requests More Object III	Makes Choices III	Requests New Object III	Requests Absent Object V	Requests Attention III	Shows Affection III	Greets People IV	Offers, Shares IV	Directs Your Attention IV	Polite Social Forms IV	Answers Yes/No Questions IV	Asks Questions IV	Names Things/ People V	Makes Comments V
III Unconventional Communication Body movements Early sounds Facial expressions Vocal behavior Simple gestures																	
IV Conventional Communication Conventional gestures Specific vocalizations Looks back & forth																	
V Concrete Symbols Object symbols Picture symbols Pantomime gestures Imitic sounds																	
VI Abstract Symbols Spoken words Manual signs Written words Braille words																	
VII Language Combinations of 2 or more symbols																	

Type of Symbol
For Levels V, VI or VII, specify types of symbols used (e.g., picture symbols, object symbols, manual signs, speech)

KEY:
 = Emerging
 = Mastered

COMMUNICATION MATRIX PROFILE for Parents