



Creating Communication Passports

The team of speech-language therapists at Talking Trouble often co-create Communication Passports with the children, youth and adults we work with. We are involved in both speech-language therapy therapeutic roles in New Zealand and also in Communication Assistant¹ roles in justice settings. This document explains some of the topics we consider when creating Communication Assistants.

Values underpinning the communication passports Talking Trouble is involved in creating.

Equity - Society privileges people with strong language and literacy skills. People who communicate differently are often ‘othered’ by society. A communication passport enables someone who communicates differently to tell the people they encounter about how they communicate – what makes it easier for them to communicate and what makes it harder. It levels the playing field. A communication passport gently, but unapologetically, says, “Hey, this is who I am and how I communicate. If you want to get to know me, work with me, and hear my point of view, these suggestions will help us communicate with each other more effectively.”

¹ <https://www.justice.govt.nz/about/lawyers-and-service-providers/service-providers/communication-assistance/>

<https://www.talkingtroublenz.org/i-work-with-whanau-tamariki-adults>

Everyone is the expert in their own experience – The person the communication passport is about must be involved in deciding what information goes into the communication passport and what doesn't. In rare instances, this may not be possible. However, most of the time, the person you are working alongside will have valuable insights into what works or doesn't work for them, which strategies are helpful, and which are annoying or might be counter productive.

Self-determination – Being involved in creating their own communication passport, deciding what information is or isn't included and who the communication passport can be shared with, contribute to that person's sense of agency, decision-making and self-advocacy.

What's a communication passport for?

Communication passports are about creating an environment where it is easier for everyone to build healthy relationships, communicate and respond helpfully and positively when things go wrong because of stress or overwhelm or because the communication context or strategies being used don't work well for the individual concerned.

Communication passports are living documents. They must be reviewed regularly and updated to reflect developing strengths as well as barriers that may emerge within the communication environment.

What information goes into a communication passport?

Tailor the content of the communication passport to suit the person. The document doesn't have to be just about communication. In our context, the communication passports we're involved with often contain information such as:

- People I enjoy spending time with
- Things I enjoy or things I'm good at
- Things I don't like
- Please don't...
- Please do...
- Things that make it easier for me to understand
- Things that make it harder for me to understand
- Things that make it easier for me to talk
- Things that make it harder for me to talk
- Things that annoy me
- Things that make me feel good
- Things that help me stay calm
- If I 'lose it', please...
- Things I'd like you to know
- Try making sure
- Try to avoid

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The section headings or the way the information is framed will change depending on what resonates for the person and what is relevant to the contexts and people who will read the passport. They might know the person already or be new to the person and to the concept of adapting communication.

Be aware of who the potential audience might be for the passport. Information about diagnoses, medication, past-traumatic events or highly private information may be inappropriate to include, or it might be useful to consider creating a range of different passports for different audiences or purposes. Consider how you will check that the final version is worded in a way that the person or important people to them are comfortable with.

Different people in different contexts will want to include different types of information. Here are examples of other communication passport templates:

<https://www.communicationpassports.org.uk/creating-passports/>

<https://www.communicationpassports.org.uk/files/cm/files/minipassportEG.doc>

<https://talklink.org.nz/resources/tip-of-the-month---april-2020---communication-passports>

In this video from Hear Me See Me, our colleague, Tracy Karanui-Golf is using a Talking Mat with a young person to help inform what the young person would like to have on their communication passport:

<https://www.hearmeseeme.nz/community-stories/creating-a-communication-passport>

More information about Talking Mats can be found here:

<https://www.talkingmats.com/>
