

Single Message Communicators

Assistive Technology communication devices help those individuals with conditions such as autism, MND, cerebral palsy, stroke, brain injury and others; make meaningful connections with the world around them.

Single message communicators are the first step in introducing technology as a way to communicate. They can help a number of children in different ways. Children with learning difficulties, children with no learning difficulties but through a physical difficulty stops them from being able to speak, and children with English as a second language. The main purpose of a single message communicator enables children with no speech to begin to have a voice. For example, it will give some individuals the power to attract attention and make requests. They are also helpful for children who have speech development delays to assist them in building their language skills, by hearing the recorded message on the device it helps them to try to say the words they hear. Through the Play At IT project, we have also found that they have been successful in helping children with English as a second language to increase their understanding and building their English language vocabulary.

Depending on the cognitive ability of an individual child they can then progress from single message communicators to multiple message devices that allow them to make choices and then move forward to more sophisticated communication devices that allows a user to communicate in a more sophisticated way e.g. Stephen Hawking's device he uses to communicate.



The single communicator device that we have been using in the Play At IT project is the Big Mack device. It has a big round switch target area that comes in a variety of colours and a volume control and on/off switch. It has a record button that allows 75 seconds of recording. To demonstrate how it works:

A fun way of using these devices in a play activity is to record a line of a nursery rhyme or story e.g. The Three Little Pigs *"I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down"*. So when the story is read and

the children join in with that particular phrase, the child using the BIGmack device can press it and join in with the other children.

Case Study

Scarlett has a severe learning difficulty that includes no communications. She is currently on an "Early Years Action Plus" and currently has 1 to 1 support at her Playgroup.

Scarlett uses the BigMack device throughout the day. Beginning with registration, which includes responding to her name being called out from the register and recording the punchlines of the 2 songs they sing at registration. Scarlett also uses it to interact at circle time, and to have the opportunity to say hello and goodbye to people she meets. Her 1to1 support workers role is to ensure that the recorded message is changed throughout the day to match the activity Scarlett is engaging with allowing Scarlett much more inclusive play opportunities.