One Education

FREE PRINTABLE PACK

FOR SEN TEACHING ASSISTANTS

TA Communication Toolkit

Practical, print-and-use tools to help you communicate clearly with pupils with SEND, and with the adults around them.



The 7 skills in this pack

Look for these colours on every page

- Active listening
- Clear language
- Non-verbal
- Patience
- Empathy
- Positive feedback
- Adaptability

What's inside

2 **"Say it simply" swap sheet** — Turn long instructions into small steps

3 **Phrase bank** — What to say instead, in 4 situations

4 **What to do when…** — 6 real moments and how to respond

5 **Lanyard prompt cards** — Pocket reminders for busy days

6 **7-week skill plan** — One skill a week, with reflection

7 **Daily handover slips** — Share what worked with the teacher

8 **Communication passport** — Blank template to fill in together

9 **Passport example** — A completed example to copy

How to use this pack

1. **Pick one tool** — Choose the page that fits your biggest challenge this week.
2. **Try it with one pupil** — Start small, at a calm time, and keep your words the same.
3. **Review together** — After a week, talk to the teacher or SENCO about what worked.

Remember: every pupil communicates differently. Always follow the pupil's support plan and your SENCO's advice first.

[QR CODE]

Want to grow your SEN support skills?

Read the full guide, Communication Skills for SEN Teaching Assistants, and explore One Education's SEN Teaching Assistant courses.

One Education

“Say It Simply” Swap Sheet

Long instructions are hard to hold in mind. Break them into short steps and give one step at a time.

✕ INSTEAD OF…	✓ TRY… (ONE STEP AT A TIME)
Starting work	
“Get your book out, find yesterday’s page and start question 3.”	Open your book. → Find page 12. → Start question 3.
“Can you get on with your writing now, please?”	Pencil in hand. → Write your name.
“When you’ve finished that one, check it and start the next.”	Check question 1. → Now question 2.
Moving between activities	
“Pack away quietly and line up at the door for assembly.”	Pencil down. → Stand up. → Line up.
“We’re going outside in a minute, so get your coat on.”	Coat on. → Then outside.
“It’s nearly time to finish, so start tidying up.”	2 more minutes. → Then tidy up.
Behaviour and safety	
“Stop running around, you know you’re not allowed to.”	Walking feet, please.
“Don’t shout out. Put your hand up if you want to say something.”	Hand up. → Wait for your name.
“Sit nicely on the carpet and stop fiddling with that.”	Sit on your spot. → Hands in your lap.
Getting help	
“If you’re stuck, have a go yourself before you ask.”	Try first. → Then ask me.
“Can you tell me what’s wrong?”	Show me. → Point to it.

4 golden rules

Name first
Say the pupil’s name, then wait for their attention.

Action word first
“Pencil down” beats “Can you put your pencil down?”

One step at a time
Give the next step only when the first is done.

Show as you say
Point, model or hold up a picture card.

One Education

Phrase Bank: What to Say Instead

Small changes in wording can make a big difference. Swap everyday phrases for ones that are clearer, kinder and more specific.

Giving instructions
Clear language

~~Stop that.~~
→ **Pencil on the table, please.**

~~Don't run!~~
→ **Walking feet.**

~~Be careful with those.~~
→ **Two hands on the scissors.**

~~Are you ready to start?~~
→ **Time to start. Open your book.**

~~Hurry up.~~
→ **You have 2 more minutes.**

Praise that helps
Positive feedback

~~Good boy. / Good girl.~~
→ **You finished all 5 questions.**

~~Well done.~~
→ **You put your hand up and waited. Great waiting.**

~~That's nice.~~
→ **I like the colours you chose for the sky.**

~~See, it wasn't that hard.~~
→ **You kept trying even when it was tricky.**

~~Brilliant! (for everything)~~
→ **You remembered the full stop at the end.**

Calm moments
Empathy

~~Calm down.~~
→ **I can see you're upset. I'm here.**

~~There's nothing to be upset about.~~
→ **That felt really hard.**

~~Stop crying.~~
→ **Take your time. I'll wait.**

~~Why did you do that?~~
→ **What happened?**

~~Talk to me!~~
→ **You can show me or point when you're ready.**

Checking understanding
Active listening

~~Do you understand?~~
→ **Show me what you'll do first.**

~~Any questions?~~
→ **Which part shall we do together?**

~~You know this.~~
→ **Tell me one thing you remember.**

~~Listen carefully.~~
→ **Look at my card. Here's step one.**

~~That's wrong.~~
→ **Nearly. Let's check this bit together.**

Say the "do", not the "don't"
Tell pupils what you want them to do. It is easier to follow than a "stop".

Fewer words when stress is high
An upset pupil can process less. Keep it short, slow and quiet.

Praise the effort, not the child
Name exactly what they did, so they know what to repeat.

What to Do When...

Six common moments, with simple things to try. If something keeps happening, talk to the class teacher or SENCO.

1 The pupil doesn't start the task

Patience · Clear language

TRY THIS

- ✓ Get close and say their name first.
- ✓ Give only the first step: "Open your book."
- ✓ Wait 10 seconds, then repeat the same words.

✕ **Avoid:** repeating the whole instruction, louder.

2 The pupil repeats your words back

Non-verbal · Adaptability

TRY THIS

- ✓ Offer a choice with pictures: "Red or blue?"
- ✓ Model the answer: "I want ___."
- ✓ Show, point or demonstrate.

✕ **Avoid:** open questions like "What do you want?"

3 The pupil says "I can't" or refuses

Empathy · Positive feedback

TRY THIS

- ✓ Name the feeling: "This looks tricky."
- ✓ Shrink the task: "Just the first one."
- ✓ Praise the start: "You wrote your name. Great start."

✕ **Avoid:** "Yes you can, it's easy."

4 The pupil shuts down or goes quiet

Patience · Empathy

TRY THIS

- ✓ Lower your voice and use fewer words.
- ✓ Give space and time. Stay nearby.
- ✓ Offer a way to answer without words: thumbs up, a card or pointing.

✕ **Avoid:** asking lots of questions at once.

5 You can't understand what the pupil says

Active listening · Adaptability

TRY THIS

- ✓ Repeat back the part you did understand.
- ✓ Ask them to show you or point.
- ✓ Use yes/no questions to narrow it down.

✕ **Avoid:** pretending you understood.

6 The pupil gets upset when an activity changes

Adaptability · Clear language

TRY THIS

- ✓ Give a warning: "2 more minutes, then tidy up."
- ✓ Use a Now/Next board or a visual timer.
- ✓ Say what happens next, then what they enjoy.

✕ **Avoid:** changing plans without any warning.

Lanyard Prompt Cards

Quick reminders you can glance at during a busy day. Each card is the size of a staff ID badge.

1. Print on card
2. Cut on the dotted line
3. Laminate
4. Punch the white circle
5. Clip to your lanyard

Wait time

Say it once.
Count to 10.
Repeat the same words.

Patience

Instructions

Name.
Action.
One step.

Clear language

Praise

Say exactly what they did well.

Positive feedback

Calm

Fewer words.
Lower voice.
Give space.

Empathy

Check

Ask them to show me, not tell me.

Active listening

My reminder

Use the blank card for your own reminder, such as a pupil's key sign or a phrase from their support plan.

My 7-Week Skill Plan

One Education

Focus on one skill each week. Tick what you tried, then jot down what worked. Bring it to supervision.

WEEK AND SKILL	THIS WEEK, TRY…	WHAT WORKED?
WEEK 1 **Active listening**	**Let pupils finish before you respond.** ☐ Wait until they have finished. ☐ Notice pointing, gestures and faces. ☐ Repeat back what you heard.	
WEEK 2 **Clear language**	**Give one step at a time.** ☐ Say the pupil's name first. ☐ Use 5 words or fewer. ☐ Try 3 swaps from page 2.	
WEEK 3 **Non-verbal**	**Say less, show more.** ☐ Get down to the pupil's level. ☐ Point, model or use picture cards. ☐ Keep a calm, open face.	
WEEK 4 **Patience**	**Give thinking time.** ☐ Count to 10 before repeating. ☐ Repeat the same words, not new ones. ☐ Don't answer for them.	
WEEK 5 **Empathy**	**Name the feeling first.** ☐ Say "That looks tricky." ☐ Lower your voice in hard moments. ☐ Use 2 calm phrases from page 3.	
WEEK 6 **Positive feedback**	**Praise exactly what they did.** ☐ Name the action you saw. ☐ Praise effort, not just results. ☐ Give 3 specific praises a day.	
WEEK 7 **Adaptability**	**If it doesn't work, change the method.** ☐ Swap words for pictures or gestures. ☐ Offer a choice of two. ☐ Share what worked at handover.	

Daily Handover Slips

Two minutes at the end of a session. Share what helped so the teacher, SENCO and family can do the same.

Handover note

☐ Needs follow-up today

Pupil initials | **Date** | **Lesson / time** | **TA name**

✓ What went well

A moment the pupil communicated or joined in.

⚠ What was difficult

When did communication break down?

What helped

Words, pictures, timing or seating that worked.

Try next time

One small change for the next session.

Message for: ☐ Teacher ☐ SENCO ☐ Home

Handover note

☐ Needs follow-up today

Pupil initials | **Date** | **Lesson / time** | **TA name**

✓ What went well

A moment the pupil communicated or joined in.

⚠ What was difficult

When did communication break down?

What helped

Words, pictures, timing or seating that worked.

Try next time

One small change for the next session.

Message for: ☐ Teacher ☐ SENCO ☐ Home

My Communication Passport

Complete it with the pupil, their family and the SENCO. Keep it with the support plan and share it with cover staff.

My photo or drawing

My name is _____

My class / year _____

The most important thing to know about me

_____

How I communicate

- ☐ Speech
- ☐ Signs
- ☐ Pictures / symbols
- ☐ Gestures
- ☐ Device / AAC
- ☐ Other

How you can help me understand

Words, pictures, timing, where to sit…

How I show I'm happy

What you might see or hear.

How I show I'm worried or upset

Early signs to look out for.

What helps when I'm upset

People, places or things that help me calm.

What doesn't help

Things to avoid.

Things I love to talk about

Great for building trust and conversation.

Words or signs I use

My word or sign	What it means

Filled in by _____ **Date** _____ **Review date** _____

Sam's Communication Passport

A made-up example to show the level of detail that helps. Short, specific and written in the pupil's voice.

EXAMPLE



My name is Sam

My class / year Oak class, Year 3

The most important thing to know about me

I understand more when you show me, not just tell me.

How I communicate

- [x] Speech
- [ ] Signs
- [x] Pictures / symbols
- [x] Gestures
- [ ] Device / AAC
- [ ] Other

I talk in short sentences. I use my picture cards when I'm tired.

How you can help me understand

Say my name first. Give me one step at a time. Show me a picture or do it first. Give me time to answer.

How I show I'm happy

I smile, hum and want to show you my work. I might jump or flap my hands.

How I show I'm worried or upset

I go quiet, pull my sleeves over my hands or put my head on the table.

What helps when I'm upset

The quiet corner by the window. My Now/Next board. Time to calm down before we talk.

What doesn't help

Lots of questions at once. Loud voices. Being touched without a warning.

Things I love to talk about

Dinosaurs (ask me about T. rex!), trains, and my dog Biscuit.

Words or signs I use

My word or sign	What it means
"All done" (flat hands)	I've finished
Break card	I need a short break
Hands on ears	It's too noisy

Filled in by Sam, Mum and Ms Ahmed (TA)

Date November

Review date February