

Makaton

Makaton is a unique language programme providing a basic means of communication for adults and children with learning difficulties or communication needs, although it is now used more widely with young children learning to speak. It is a well known type of Augmentative and Alternative Communication system.

What is Makaton?

Makaton uses signs, and symbols to offer a functional method of communication, which can be easily carried over into daily life. Makaton was developed from British Sign Language but is now a unique signing system. This has led to the design of a Makaton Vocabulary, which is based on four basic principles:



1. Teaching a small, core vocabulary of functional words;
2. Organising the core vocabulary into a sequence of communicative priorities;
3. Personalising the vocabulary to suit each individual Makaton user's needs (Walker, 1990);
4. Combining the use of different methods of communication, including speech, manual sign and picture symbols.

Makaton allows users to reach their full potential, by allowing them to express their ideas/thoughts/feelings, to be included in everyday life, to engage in conversation with others, and to participate in education.

Why use Makaton?

There are a range of benefits to using this approach, including (but not limited to):

- Increasing understanding of language;
- Developing spoken language;
- Supporting or supplementing spoken language;
- Developing written language;
- Improving social interaction;
- Building meaningful relationships.

Who can benefit from Makaton?

Makaton can be used with children and adults with a range of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), including (but not limited to):

- Profound, severe, moderate or mild learning disabilities;
- Autistic Spectrum Conditions;
- Developmental delays;

- Sensory impairment;
- Specific language impairment.

Who can deliver Makaton?

Makaton can be delivered by parents, carers, teachers, support staff and anyone else interacting with the child/adult, who has received training and advice from a Speech and Language Therapist to support their use of the approach.

Evidence for Makaton

Evidence for the effectiveness of Makaton demonstrates significant positive outcomes for its users (Bickford-Smith, Wijayatilake & Woods, 2005; Lal, 2010) and is therefore a useful approach to implement, where appropriate.

References

Bickford-Smith, A., Wijayatilake, L. & Woods, G. (2005). Evaluating the effectiveness of an early years language intervention. *Educational Psychology in Practice: theory, research and practice in educational psychology*, 49, pp. 161-173.

Lal, R. (2010). Effect of alternative and augmentative communication on language and social behaviour of children with autism. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 5(3), pp.119-125.

Walker, M. (1990). The Makaton Vocabulary: using manual signs and graphic symbols to develop interpersonal communication and augmentative and alternative communication. *Special Education: Forward Trends*, 6, pp. 15-28.