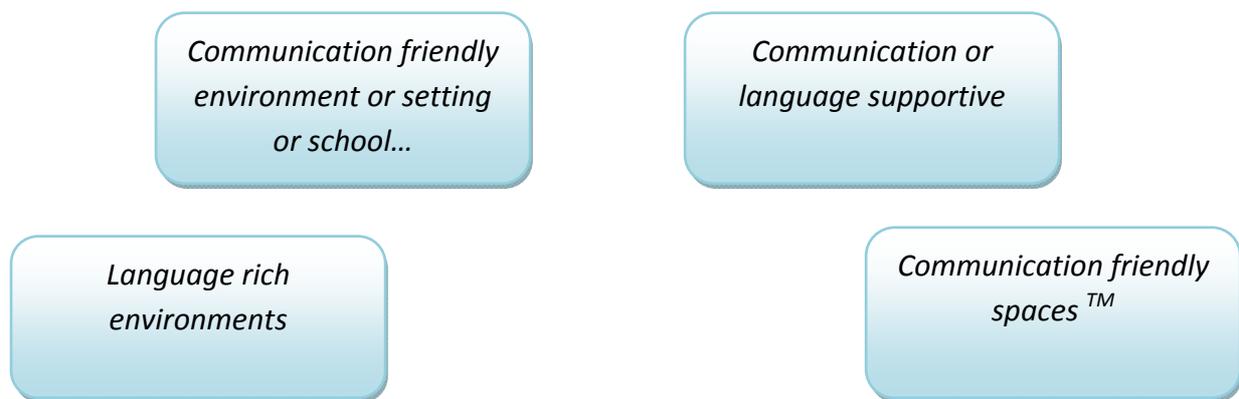# Making your place great for communication

It is widely recognised that the environment that a child or young person is in can make a big difference to their communication – whether it's always noisy and chaotic or if there are good times and spaces to talk…

This booklet highlights how we can make sure environments work well to support communication and gives some ideas for useful resources and information if you would like to find out more.

What's in a name?

> *Communication friendly environment or setting or school…*

> *Communication or language supportive*

> *Language rich environments*

> *Communication friendly spaces* TM

There are many different names to describe making a place great for communication. Sometimes the term is very specific – for example 'communication friendly spaces' has a trademark. Other terms, for example 'communication friendly settings' are used by different people in different ways, so may include variations in what is actually included to describe somewhere that is 'communication friendly'.

In this booklet we will use the term 'communication friendly environments'. This includes all places where people work with children and young people – settings, services, schools, childminders etc. This term is relevant for all different age ranges from early years through to 19 years.

The purpose of a communication friendly environment

A communication friendly environment should make communication as easy, effective and enjoyable as possible. It should provide opportunities for everyone to talk, listen, understand and take part. A communication friendly environment will support the development of all children's communication skills and usually includes features which will also be particularly beneficial for children and young people with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). Developing a communication friendly environment can also be seen as removing barriers to communication. A communication friendly environment will also support learning, social and emotional development.

As well as the many benefits for the children and families you work with, developing a communication friendly environment really helps make sure that everyone working within this environment really understand how important communication is to overall development.

Key features

Communication friendly environments may include some, or all, of the following features:

✓ **Space, light and layout**
Are there cosy, comfortable places to talk? Can you see people's faces when they are talking? Can you rearrange the layout of the room to suit different opportunities for talking – as pairs, small or large groups?

✓ **Noise levels**
What is the general level of noise like? Are there noisy distractions from inside or out? Are there ways to gain people's attention? Can everyone hear and be heard? Are there times of quietness?

✓ **Using visual support**
Signs, symbols, photographs and sometimes writing are features of many approaches to a communication friendly environment. How widely and consistently are they used? Are they used as labels, to support routines, as timetables? Are parents shown how they work? Is there the right amount and kind of visual support for the age and development of the children?

✓ **Clear and consistent routines**
How does the environment help children to know what to expect and when? How well are visual supports used to help children understand and follow routines?

✓ **The role of adults in the environment**
Some approaches include the skills and approaches adults use to listen and talk with children and young people and how they develop each child or young person's speech, language and communication skills as part of their communication friendly environment.

✓ **How opportunities are planned and created to support communication throughout the day**
Almost all events, encounters or activities within the day can support speech, language and communication, so a communication friendly environment looks to make sure all these opportunities are planned for and used. Alongside this, activities specifically designed to focus on communication should be planned.

Key features also include the ways in which parents, carers and others are part of the environment to support communication.

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What is available to help me make my place communication friendly?

There are many local and national resources available. A number of these are free of charge. We have included a list of some resources in this booklet, but it would also be useful for you to ask around locally if a particular approach is used where you are.

Some of the approaches begin with an *audit* of the environment. This often includes a checklist where you can look at more detailed descriptions of the features of a communication friendly environment. This can give a sense of how well an environment supports communication and highlights particular areas for further development.

Some of the approaches include an award or recognition scheme – where settings can be accredited or 'badged' as meeting the criteria for being communication friendly.

Where can I find out more?

This list is not comprehensive, but includes some examples of approaches to making an environment communication friendly. If you know of an approach that works really well for you, or have examples of practice that has been really effective, please let us know at
enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

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