

Chailey Communication System (CCS) Manual For use

Chailey Heritage Clinical Services and Chailey Heritage School is a specialist centre in East Sussex providing education, assessment, medical and therapy services for children and adults with complex neurodisabilities.

What is the CCS?

The Chailey Communication System (CCS) is a low tech communication book. The CCS refers to the way that the vocabulary is laid out in the book: it has 16 categories, each with a number of subcategories and potentially an unlimited number of vocabulary items.

History

The comprehensive system was first introduced at Chailey Heritage in the summer of 1991, by a team of people lead by Valerie Moffat, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist and Lisbeth Meek, specialist teacher working in conjunction with Widgit. Since then hundreds of children, young people and adults have benefitted from using this communication system to communicate.

Originally the CCS was developed for children with severe visual impairment. The systematic structure and layout meant that it was predictable and could be learnt by people who required auditory scanning: they were able to predict what came next. However, it soon became apparent that this system was suitable for people who did not have a visual impairment, but who required a structured alternative communication system. Therefore the original project team developed the CCS using Rebus symbols as well as a written word version.

The CCS Twenty years on

During the last 2 years a new project team has been established in order to review the CCS. The team consists of speech and language therapists from Chailey Heritage Clinical Services, a specialist teacher from Chailey Heritage School and the team at Widgit.

The team have updated and modernised the vocabulary in all the categories; many more phrases have been added to the vocabulary lists. The book has been produced using the new Widgit symbols. Widgit have developed new symbols for the CCS in order to accommodate all the additional vocabulary.

During the project, the team has consulted with teachers who use the CCS daily, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses and families to ensure that all the most commonly used vocabulary is available.

In addition, people who use the CCS were consulted to help critique the current CCS and to give their ideas about improvements or additions to the vocabulary and layout of the system.

The Different Versions

As a result of the recent project, new products are available. CCS books with 6, 15 or 45 vocabulary items per page are now available in order to allow for a wider range of users to access the system. Each of these versions could be printed in black and white or colour; each of these could be made in A4 or A5.

There is not necessarily progression through the 3 versions. Assessment is needed in order to determine the most appropriate version for an individual.

Organisation

The CCS is organised into 16 categories identified on the CATEGORY PAGE.

Within each category there are a number of sub categories or TOPICS, and within these topics a number of VOCABULARY ITEMS. Vocabulary items can be single words or short phrases. Therefore, in order for a user to locate any vocabulary item they need to go through these 3 levels. For example in order to indicate the word 'classroom', the following is required;

1) CATEGORY: **PLACES**



2) SUBCATEGORY: **SCHOOL**



3) ITEM: **CLASSROOM**



Vocabulary items may be found in more than one category depending on their context.

Despite what might at first appear to be a rigid structure, the CCS provides huge flexibility - it can be used to express single words, short phrases and complex novel phrases.

Categories are colour coded to assist with learning, these are largely based on the Fitzgerald key, with some additional colours added such as time = gold as in gold watch and world = brown as in earth.

Personalisation

The vocabulary in the CCS is based on experience of people using the system. Over the last 2 years it has been updated by a team of people aiming to ensure that the most relevant vocabulary is included.

However, additional vocabulary should be added throughout the user's life to reflect their development and changing needs.

For example:

About me - hurt - add relevant issues/ frequent pain issues/common problems

People - add names (and photos if appropriate) of known people
- add extra sub categories/ topics for specific social circles e.g.
Scouts / church / clubs

Places - add favourite places to go, local places

Phrases - add jokes/swear words relevant to a person's age and level of understanding

Equipment - add personal items of equipment

The CCS should expand and grow and needs to be updated by all those communicating with the user.

The first page in the *About Me* category is for personal information. This should be written with the user and updated as necessary. The user can access this page in order to tell people about themselves.

Blank Spaces

Blank cells have been left in most subcategories to allow space for personalisation.

A blank template page has also been provided for each category so that additional personal sub categories can be added.

Access methods

The CCS can be accessed using different methods, depending on the user's abilities.

Direct access

Users may be able to point to the symbols with a finger, fist, eye pointing, and head pointer. They may or may not need support to turn the pages.

Indirect access

➤ VISUAL SCANNING

- LINEAR (1 by 1) - Communication partner points to each symbol, in order and waits/watches for the user to indicate yes when they get to the one they want.
- ROW/COLUMN - communication partner points along the rows, waiting for the users yes response, then points along the columns. This skills needs t be learnt and can make access quicker.
- PAGE/BLOCK - the communication partner points to pages and / or blocks and waits for the user to indicate yes. This can only be used when the user is familiar with the vocabulary, and / or can quickly scan the pages. This technique can significantly speed up the communication.

➤ AUDITORY SCANNING

Communication partner reads aloud the items in order, waiting for the users yes response.

Some users, especially when learning the symbols, use a combination of visual and auditory scanning.

With any scanning methods, it is important to scan the symbols in the same order every time, left to right, top to bottom, in order for it to be predictable for the user.

Skills to consider when deciding on the appropriate CCS level

- Ability to give a consistent positive response
- Size of symbols
- Number of symbols per page
- Access method
- Memory

- Attention Level
- Ability to initiate communication
- Receptive language ability
- Understanding of nouns/verbs/prepositions etc
- Expressive language ability
- Literacy skills
- Categorisation/sub categorisation skills
- Understanding of spoken language
- Symbolic understanding

Handy hints when using a CCS

- Add a missing words page at the back of the book so that people can write down vocabulary as it comes up in conversation. Symbols can then be added when more convenient
- Use a pen and paper - write down what a person says. Then you can go back and check it with them. They may use key word speaking - so words may be given in a different order - writing them down can help you to remember and make sense of the message
- Write user instructions in the front of each book including how a person indicates yes and no
- Familiarise yourself with what is in the CCS so you can help the user
- Don't rush - it can take years for a user to become an expert
- Remember that repetition and consistency are extremely important to the user who is anticipating and accessing the word s/he really wants to say.
- Do not assume you know what they want to say.
- Remember that the personalised vocabulary requires regular updating.
- Role model using a CCS yourself when communicating to users.

Teaching Strategies

The CCS enables the person to access a wider range of vocabulary, and can be used with pictures, symbols, words and in any language.

The CCS can be used to support language understanding as well as expression of language.

As well as enabling the person to express a need, convey a message or share an idea it can be used:

- To establish a level of language comprehension and expression
- To identify gaps in language development
- In all teaching and social situations
- To deal with specific topic/subject areas
- To teach grammatical concepts

Teaching Symbols

There are 4 types of symbol identified. These may need different level and style of teaching.

1. Recognisable symbols - are usually recognisable to any reader as they clearly illustrate the object or action they represent
2. Guessable symbols - are fairly abstract but follow strict rules allowing the meaning of any symbol to be guessed once the rules are learnt.
3. Learnable symbols - need to be taught as it is difficult to guess their intended meaning from the symbol alone. However many people with learning difficulties find these easier to remember than text alone.
4. Abstract symbols - are the most difficult to work with as they are purely abstract representations and are very difficult to recognise without being first taught the meaning. Some symbols, such as sorry, are based on the action used in the BSL or Makaton sign languages. These symbols are often not used in pieces of text except for the most advanced symbol-users.

Teaching Categorisation

In order to use the CCS a person would need to have developed the concept of object permanence, be able to recognise and associate a verbal label to a common object and then establish the ability to categorise. These skills can be taught and practised in games with familiar objects and their corresponding colourful pictures, both at home or in an educational setting.

Teaching the use of colours

People are taught to relate colours and categories, again using games with objects, pictures and symbols. Specific colours have been assigned to particular categories based on the Fitzgerald Key.

Using CCS to teach topics

This is a way of teaching the system to a person by working on a specific category or topic, which is relevant to the young person. Vocabulary can be linked to a school topic, a school outing or to a situation at home, for example going shopping, visiting relatives. If there are gaps shown in knowledge or categorisation skills these can be targeted during teaching sessions.

Teaching Choices

The CCS enables the person to make real choices rather than being limited to a small range of options. The person's level of verbal comprehension will dictate the number of choices given at first but as gaps in the person's vocabulary and knowledge are shown, these can be targeted during teaching sessions.

Transition from symbol to text

If a user of the CCS can move from symbols to the printed word then this is an easily understood form of communication. Some people will be able to see the written word when using their CCS book and this will help them gradually move from symbols to text if they have the appropriate pre-requisite skills and the appropriate teaching.

People may have neurological conditions which mean that they use the CCS as a form of communication but with residual literacy skills.

Teaching communication skills

People can use their CCS to communicate within a group or working in pairs, and these times can be used to develop essential communication and social skills and strategies, for example listening, turn taking, eye contact and memory.

Personal, Social and Health Education

The CCS can be used to give people the opportunity to discuss personal and social topics. Specific vocabulary and topic pages can be devised to allow young people to discuss issues such as relationships, dating and sex. These are areas which the young people have strong opinions on but without a system of communication such as the CCS their views and opinions would not be expressed.

Who Can Use the CCS?

- This system can be used with children, young people and adults as the vocabulary can be tailored to their individual needs.
- Specifically the CCS can be used with:
- Pre-school children in order to develop their receptive and expressive language and to be a tool for language and vocabulary teaching.
- People with visual impairment as the systematic structure can be accessed using auditory scanning.
- People with a complex physical disability who would benefit from a systematic structure.
- Children and young people who require assistance with vocabulary and language acquisition and development.
- People who require a system of communication to augment their spoken language. It could be that the person requires a system to support their speech, if it is not always intelligible, or it could be supporting their language, for example if a person has word finding difficulties.
- People who have an acquired brain injury. It can be used as a temporary system, while speech and language skills improve, or it can be a permanent support system.
- Adults with progressive neurodisabilities.
- Any one with a speech and language difficulty.

The packs

The packs should be printed in either A4 or A5 depending on the users needs.

It is advisable to put each page into a plastic wallet and then into a ring binder. It can help to put an additional fastening through each page, such as a treasury tag, in order to keep the pages in the correct order.

Some users like to have their name and/or a photo on the front cover of the folder; others prefer to choose a favourite coloured folder.

Create category dividers; you may want to add additional tabs to help the communication partner to locate the category.

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