My Ways to Communicate at Home

A Four Pillars toolkit for non-speaking and nonverbal children

Tom Tom's reminder

Tom Tom, his two Pound Pups and Nanny Jax use words, pictures, gestures, objects, movement, AAC and quiet time to understand one another. Every person's communication is worth listening to.

"Non-speaking", "nonverbal" and other words mean different things to different people. Use the child's own preferred words when you know them.

Adults can help by

- Keeping the child's usual AAC, communication book, device and picture cards available and within reach.
- Offering a message or choice, then waiting. Do not turn communication into a test.
- Accepting communication by pointing, looking, gesture, sign, object, movement, writing, AAC or a trusted signal.
- Treating "no", "stop", "not now" and "I need a break" as meaningful communication.

A gentle safety note

If a child communicates pain, illness, fear or an urgent need, respond and check what support is needed. Do not assume silence means "yes", "no" or "nothing is wrong".

The Four Pillars and communication

Use familiar words, objects or symbols that make sense to your child.

BRIAN'S | Thoughts, ideas and questions

Possible messages: "I think...", "I want...", "I don't know", "I have a question".

Adult: make room for an idea; offer a way to share it; do not finish the child's message for them.

WAVES | Body signals, feelings and support

Possible messages: "too much", "help", "pain", "break", "quiet", "more time".

Adult: reduce pressure; check immediate needs and surroundings; offer support and accept "no".

CIRCLES | Routines, change and what happens next

Possible messages: "now", "next", "finished", "wait", "different plan".

Adult: show what is happening and what changed; keep a visual sequence available; allow processing time.

BRIDGES | Interests, relationships and connection

Possible messages: "look", "play with me", "stay near", "space", "not now".

Adult: follow the child's interest, invite connection, and respect their chosen distance and pace.

These are examples, not a required vocabulary list. Keep the child's own communication system and familiar symbols as the priority.

Home message board

Point, look, touch, gesture, use AAC, or choose another response.

Cut out or use this whole page. Add familiar photos or symbols if they work better for your child. Keep the board beside—not instead of—their usual communication system.

YES	NO	STOP	HELP
BREAK	MORE TIME	WAIT	ALL DONE
TOO MUCH	QUIET	DRINK	TOILET
PAIN	MY CHOICE	NOT SURE	SHOW ME

A child can communicate “yes” in one way and “no” in another. Check what their signals mean, and confirm important choices accessibly.

Personal message cards

Add a picture, object cue or familiar symbol in the open space.

These cards can be adapted to the child’s own words. A card is an invitation to communicate, never a demand to use it.

I want…

I do not want…

I need…

Something hurts

Please wait

Show me

Come with me

Give me space

I have a question

Change the plan

I need my device

I want to stop

Use the blank area for a photo, drawing, object cue or symbol the child recognises. Remove or change cards that do not fit.

Show what happens next

A simple visual plan can make home routines easier to follow.

Use photos, drawings, objects or words your child understands. Include pauses and choices. A plan can change; show the change as soon as you can.

My Now / Next / Later plan

NOW	NEXT	LATER

If the plan changes

We thought: _____ Now: _____

What stays the same? _____ What can I choose? _____

A home routine I want to make clearer

Starting cue: _____ Finished cue: _____

Things that help me feel ready: _____

My communication plan

A page for the people who support me at home.

Fill this in together if the child wants to. The child can contribute in any way, or ask an adult to complete it from what they know and check it with them later.

I communicate using (for example AAC, gesture, pictures, objects, writing):

My reliable ways to say YES / NO / STOP are:

Please keep these communication tools available and charged:

When I need more time, you may notice or I may show:

Things that help me feel understood or connected:

If I show pain, illness, fear or an urgent need, please:

Our promise

We will listen, wait, make communication available, and respect the child’s “no”, “stop”, “not now” and need for a different way.