

Social Haptic Signals as AAC

If you are close to a person with multiple disabilities who also has visual and hearing impairments, it is important to understand how to use social haptic signals as an Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC).

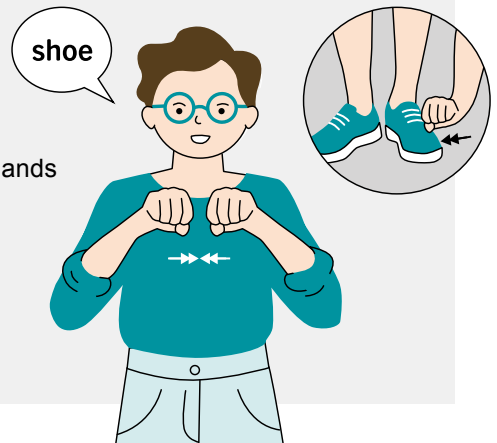
Tactile Communication

A person with both visual and hearing impairments relies on touch to communicate, even if they have some residual vision and hearing. Social haptic signals consist of touches on the body through movements, gestures, or tactile signs. Tactile signs are derived from sign language and are adapted to be performed on the recipient's body. Some people who benefit from social haptic signals can also perceive spoken language, sign language, or tactile signs received in their hands. Social haptic signals can be used in parallel with these other forms of communication.



Choosing Social Haptic Signals

You can use general social haptic signals available on Nkcdb's website or create your own. Based on sign language, the range of social haptic signals is not limited, nor is what you can communicate. Start with what is meaningful to the individual, the situations they encounter, what is most important for them to know, and where and how the signals should be performed on their body. Both execution and recognition are facilitated when the surrounding environment consistently uses the same tactile signs, regardless if they are performed and received in the hands or on the body.



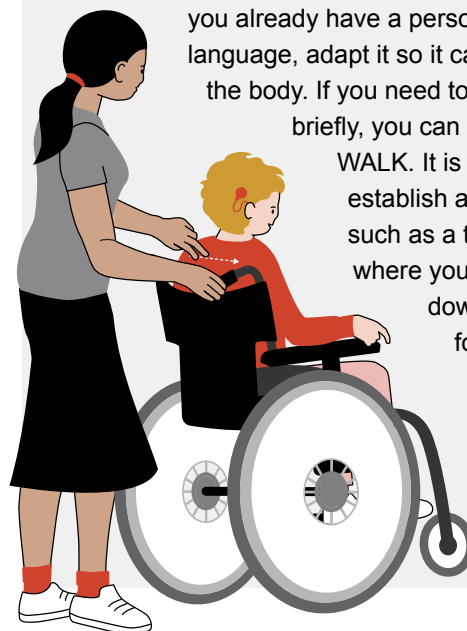
Where and How on the Body

Signs, gestures, and movements can be performed on various parts of the body, known as neutral zones, such as the shoulder, arm, or back. Adapt the touch according to each person's preferences and conditions, such as motor or sensory impairments. For instance, tactile signs can be performed on the person's chest instead of their back if they use a wheelchair. Some signs in sign language have a fixed location on the body that can also be used when performed on the person's body, such as WANT, DAD, and FOOD. Others are typically performed "in the air" and need to be moved on to the body, such as the sign for MORE. How you perform tactile signals and signs on the person's body is significant. Variations such as small or large movements, fast or slow pace, and light or firm pressure add nuances to the communication.



Establish Contact and Say Goodbye

It is important to make your presence known so the person is not startled by sudden contact on their body. For example, first place your hand on the person's arm or shoulder. You can ease the contact by creating a personal greeting on the person's body, such as the sign for MUM or a circle on their chest. If you already have a personal sign in sign language, adapt it so it can be received on the body. If you need to leave the person briefly, you can use the sign for WALK. It is also important to establish a goodbye signal, such as a tactile gesture where you "wave" up and down a few times on, for example, their shoulder or hand without breaking contact.





A Way to Confirm

Touch and tactile gestures can be used to confirm that you perceive what the person is experiencing and communicating. Pay attention to whether the person responds to, for example, touch, pressure, vibrations, light, or sound, and confirm the experience by touching the corresponding place on the person's body. The person's

own sounds and gestures can be confirmed by placing your hand on their body or by gently patting a few times. These confirming gestures can be varied in intensity through changes in speed and pressure.

Examples

- The person is attentive to sunlight falling on a specific part of their body, and you gently stroke your hand over the same area.
- The person vocalizes a particular melody to request a specific song. You pat the person on the shoulder before retrieving the iPad to play the song.

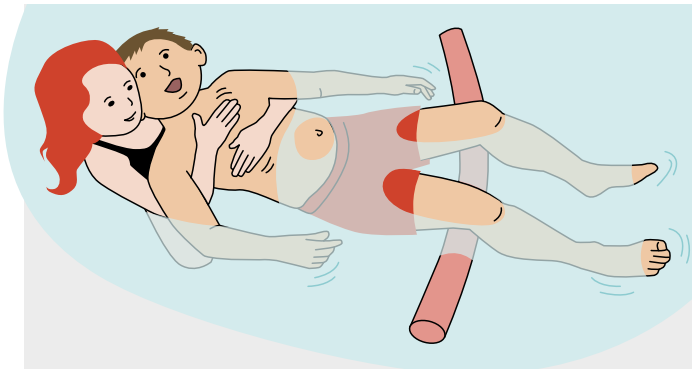
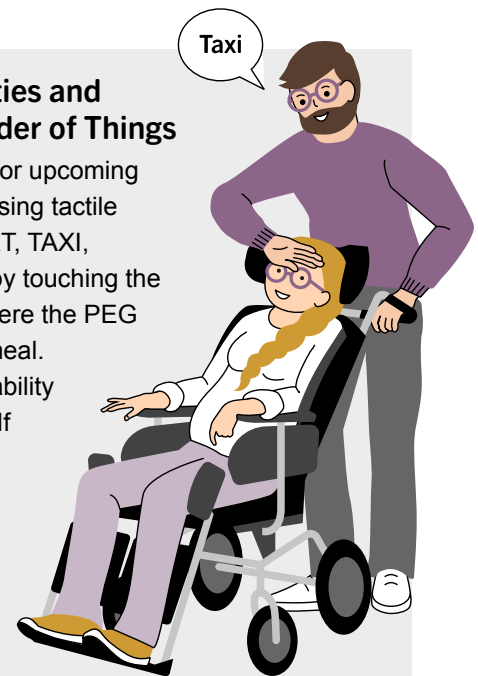
Preparing Activities and Clarifying the Order of Things

Prepare the person for upcoming events or activities using tactile signs such as TOILET, TAXI, TOOTHBRUSH, or by touching the part of their body where the PEG is located before a meal.

This creates predictability and reduces stress. If

possible, use the person's fingers or knuckles to explain the sequence of events. For example, you can squeeze one finger or touch one knuckle at a

time to communicate firstly/then/lastly. You can indicate completion with the sign FINISHED by moving the palm of your hand quickly downward along their upper arm or placing your hand so that your palms touch and moving your hand downwards.



Commenting Within the Situation

Remember not only to use tactile signals and signs to clarify, but also to comment and provide feedback about what is happening in the situation. In this way, you provide linguistic input through the body. Pay attention to the person's focus, reactions, emotions, and expressions, and use tactile signs to comment on them. Wait for the person's response and repeat the signs if necessary.

Examples

- The person is playfully interacting with a friend and you tactually sign PLAY under the person's chin.
- The person is painting, and you tactually sign PAINT on the person's arm.
- The person smiles and laughs, and you tactually sign HAPPY on the person's chest.



Indicating Direction and Movement

Use tactile movements on the person's body to indicate directions and support movement. This can be especially helpful if they have limited mobility, guiding them to orientate themselves in different situations.

Directions for movement can be indicated tactilely by moving your hand on their shoulder in the direction you are going. You can also communicate that you are going somewhere by adapting the sign for GO by sliding your palm down their arm. If the person uses a wheelchair, you can indicate backing up or moving forwards by lightly pressing their shoulder backwards or forwards.