INTRODUCTION

Communication permits us to advocate for our needs, develop relationships, and participate in our community. When supporting someone with Autism, the most important thing to keep in mind at all times is that speech does not equal communication. While people with Autism may speak, they may experience significant challenges communicating, or getting their thoughts, dreams and needs across in a manner that others readily understand. For those who don’t speak—as well as those who may use spoken language—in addition to supportive forms of communication (from smart phones, to tablets, to AAC devices, to sign language) your ability to accept how they must communicate and to provide necessary individualized supports is empowering.

Never assume that an individual is not able to communicate because they don’t use spoken language, and never assume a person is able to communicate because they speak. This can be a challenging concept to understand; however, because Autism is a condition that features significant differences in social-communication, you will feel most rewarded in your work by finding out about and using the forms of communication someone you support turns to on a daily basis. Presume competence and take the time to learn how to communicate with someone you support using his or her preferred methods.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW!

1. Familiarize yourself with the methods someone you support uses to communicate. Does he need to use different methods of communication in different settings or situations? Does he use multiple methods simultaneously?

2. Never pressure or force a person with autism who uses speech to “just say it.” Instead, be patient and make sure she has the tools necessary to communicate in the way that works best for her.

3. As a general rule of thumb, slow the pace of your speech and use concrete or concise language when communicating verbally with someone you support. If the individual uses technology or devices (with or without spoken languages), follow the same principle of using concrete and concise language.