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Total Communication: Learning to Use Different Communication Methods

Read this page to learn what total communication is, and if it's right for your child.

What total communication (TC) is

- TC is a way of teaching children with hearing loss.
- TC encourages children with hearing loss to communicate with hearing people and each other.
- TC uses both seeing and hearing to communicate.

A child who is taught using total communication may learn many skills:

- Listening by using what hearing she has left
- Communicating with sign language
- Talking
- Getting her ideas across with gestures and body language
- Understanding others through reading lips, listening and/or sign language
- Learning cued speech. **Cued speech** is a system of special handshapes and positions used when someone talks. It helps a person with hearing loss understand when someone speaks.

As a child's skills grow, she may switch from one way of communicating to another. For example, as a child learns to speak, she may use sign language less often so others can understand her better.

What happens in a TC program

All TC programs are not the same:

- In some TC programs, teachers and children always speak and sign at the same time. This is called **simultaneous communication**, or **simcom**.
 - These programs encourage children to use the hearing they have left.
 - These programs encourage children to talk and learn language.
 - These programs usually follow a signing system based on English.
- In some TC programs, teachers emphasize learning language.
 - Teachers may sign without speaking at the same time.
 - Teachers may spend less time on using the hearing that is left and talking.
 - These programs may use **American Sign Language (ASL)**. ASL does not match spoken English .

How learning the total communication method affects children's lives

- TC gives children the tools they need to understand others. They also learn how to be understood at a very young age.
- TC makes communicating less frustrating.
- TC helps children learn by giving them language.

How to choose a program

Start with these questions when looking for a TC program:

- Do the teachers speak or sign, or both?
- If they sign, what kind of sign language do they use? Do they use ASL or English-based signs? How do you feel about their choices?
- Do all teachers use the same amount of speaking and signing?
- Do they have any services to help parents learn sign language?
- Do they have any services for other members of the family?
- How closely do parents and staff work together?

What other parents say

Read our [Parent Talk](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/meet/parents/communicating.jsp) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/meet/parents/communicating.jsp>) page to see what parents said about the communication method they chose.

How to find a total communication program in your area

Call your local school district and any deaf schools in your area. They can tell you if there's a TC program near you.

Learn more about total communication

- [Deaf Linx](http://deafnix.com/options_tc.html) (http://deafnix.com/options_tc.html) tells you about the good and bad points of total communication.
- [ERIC Digests](http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed414677.html) (<http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed414677.html>) describes total communication. This page also gives you questions to ask when choosing a program.

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You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/communicating/choices/tc.jsp>