

Text Messaging to Support PC TALK

When used as part of home-based parenting programs, text messaging can support parents' use of the Promoting Communication Tools for Advancing Language in Kids (PC TALK) strategies. Text messaging can also promote parent engagement in the intervention, and with their home visitor or provider. Many home visitors use text messaging for scheduling and confirming visits, but when used to support implementation of PC TALK, text messaging can be an effective tool for supporting parents' use of the strategies beyond home visits, in the day-to-day interactions between parents and children.

How do I talk to families about text messaging?

After you have introduced the PC TALK strategies to families, and they are beginning to use the strategies, introduce and offer text messaging as a way to provide some new ideas for how to use the PC strategies throughout their week, and a way to stay in touch outside of visits.

Meeting the individual needs of families is always a priority and as a result, introducing the idea of texting with the PC Talk intervention will look different for each family that you support. Please review the PC TALK Text Messaging Video Tutorial to see one example of how to talk to families about texting.

Please note that if you have already established text messaging as a method of communication with families in the past, then the PC TALK text messages can be used within your existing "system." If you have not established text messaging as a communication tool, the first step would be talking to the family about whether texting is a possible and if families would like to receive text messages. Families must consent to receiving PC TALK text messages from your organization.

Once you have introduced the idea of PC TALK text messages, other conversation topics with families may include:

- Is the family's data plan limited?
- How frequently would families like to receive text messages?
- What time of day would families like to receive text messages?
- What types of information might you share with the family via text?

How should I use this Text Message resource?

This manual provides sample text messages, which you can use with the families you are supporting. You may use the messages provided here, or adapt them. You may create your own messages to support families and support intervention delivery. We **ENCOURAGE** you to individualize your text messages, and offer some suggestions about how to do this.

How often should I send Text Messages?

We recommend sending text messages at least three days per week. Our research shows this can have an impact on parent use of the PC strategies. Our research has also shown that when additional text messages are sent, families are likely to continue to increase their use of the strategies. Therefore, it is recommended that families receive between 3-7 text messages per week. Talk to families to ask about their preference and check back in with them often to ensure you are sending the "right" amount of text messages for that family.

Can I create my own Text Messages?

Yes! We encourage you to create your own messages that tie in with the work you are doing with your families. Feel free to create your own or use the messages in this manual as inspiration. You may edit these messages, combine two messages into one, or make them more, or less specific – whatever would make the text messages most interesting and informative

to the family with whom you are working.

What should I keep in mind when creating original Text Messages?

There are a few things to keep in mind:

- Make sure the message is relevant for the parent and the child.
- Keep it brief and stay positive.
- Mix up your messages -- vary the messages you send so they stay interesting. For example, in one week, you might (1) give an idea for how to practice a new skill, (2) provide some information on a developmental milestone to watch for, and (3) offer encouragement or praise for a job well done. Asking questions is another way to mix up the messages and encourage interaction.
- Try to give a brief rationale for why a suggestion might help (a "what to do" and a "why"). For example, "Spend some time looking at books each day so that it becomes a habit and something your child looks forward to," rather than simply "Read books every day."
- Don't be afraid to have fun.

What kind of Text Messages should I send?

You may send a combination of "standardized" and "individualized" messages each week. Some messages can be a "standardized" message that you use from the text message menu or create yourself. These are messages that you send to a group of families, such as a tip about a community event that you might send to any family.

Some messages each week should be individualized to the family. This means that it relates to something you have been working on with the specific family.

Be sure to maintain a focus on the Promoting Communication strategies in the messages you

send, but you may also send messages pertaining to the families' goals, or other topics you have addressed with the family. We recommend a "mix" of PC TALK text messages and messages focused on other topics, to ensure the text messages stay interesting and relevant to each family.

Examples of types of messages might include:

Offer suggestions about how they can use the language strategies you discussed during that past week's visit.

- **Example:** "Try imitating your child's happy sounds when you're changing their diaper. See if your child will then imitate or copy those sounds back to you."

Provide prompts or reminders about specific activities, strategies, or behaviors discussed during the previous home visit.

- **Example:** "Children are less likely to misbehave when they have fun activities to keep them busy. If you know you need to be busy doing something tonight, have a plan to keep your child occupied in a fun activity."

Follow-up on topics you recently discussed with the family.

- **Example:** "When potty training, try to stay positive. Accidents will happen, and they are nothing to get upset about."

Ask questions about strategy use or child communication. Try to ask questions that only require a brief response. Pose questions that emphasize parents' successes. The point is not to stump parents or catch them when they have not practiced. It is to enhance the intervention, prompt parents to reflect on their performance and progress, and have an opportunity to report positively on these things.

- **Example:** Instead of asking "Did you practice today?", ask "Were you able to try out one or two steps in the last few days?" or "If you only used one strategy, which do

you think might be easiest to start with?"

Offer supportive messages aimed at promoting interaction and engagement, providing support, and building your relationship with the parent.

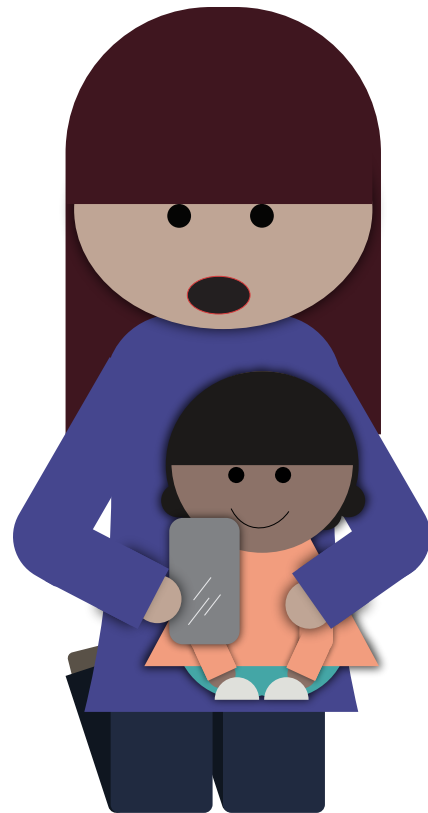
- **Example:** If the family is going through a difficult situation, you might offer words of support (i.e., "You're doing such a wonderful job in a really stressful situation. Hang in there!" or "What you said in our visit about parenting being hard is so true, but I can see that you're really doing your very best with Kenold.")
- **Example:** "You were so calm when David got so fussy at our visit. I was so impressed. That's not easy to do!"

Send messages that provide suggestions for free or fun family activities or resources. Watch for events that families might appreciate or enjoy, such as library book time, community activities, or free resources, and share these via text message.

Over time, be sure to check in with families about the text messages you are sending. Confirm that they are being received, if the number of text messages sent each week is adequate, if you are sending them on the days when families can try the tips in the text messages, and whether or not the content of the text messages is helpful.

Check in often with families to understand how text messaging is working for them. Check to be sure families are receiving their messages, and you are receiving their replies.

Text messaging should add value to your interactions and intervention, and not over-burdensome for either of you. Be sure to check in often with families to be sure they are still finding text messaging beneficial and enjoyable.



General PC TALK Text Messages

The following are text messages which are aimed at supporting the use of the PC TALK Strategies. After these general PC TALK messages, you will find messages that describe how the PC TALK strategies can be used in specific daily routines. You are encouraged to individualize the text messages you send so that they are specific to family needs and goals. Feel free to “mix and match” the PC TALK strategies with typical daily routines, and provide examples that are tailored to the child’s current level of communication.

- Remember to practice the PC TALK strategies we talked about in our last visit. If it seems difficult or strange at first, keep practicing and eventually it will seem very natural.
- Your child is always observing and learning from you. Remember to model good communication, even when you aren’t speaking directly to your child.
- When children hear more words, hear how words are used, and see how people communicate their needs and wants, they are more likely to use gestures, vocalize and use words to communicate their needs and wants.
- Remember to talk clearly to your child and avoid baby talk. If your child hears the words correctly, they are more likely to say the words correctly.
- Remember to treat your child the same way you like to be treated. Show some love every day.
- Learning should always be fun. If it gets difficult or frustrating, change the activity.
- Play pretend games – be zoo animals, or fish, or dancers, or chefs.
- This weekend, try to make up a story. Talk through the story together, using your child’s name, or the names of people your child knows. Refer to familiar places and activities in the story to build interest.
- Try turning off the TV tonight and having a play night. Plan a fun activity, or just play whatever your child would like to play tonight.
- Read with your child sitting in your lap, if they are open to it.
- Choose books that are repetitive and predictable – children love to know what is going to happen next. They might even tell YOU the story!

Arranging the Environment Text Messages

General Physical and Social Environment:

- Try to organize toys so your child can choose from more than one activity or toy. Place a few toys out to help children stay busy and keep learning.
- Try to arrange your child's toys and books to encourage your child to talk about them. This might mean making a book corner, or a doll or truck area.
- Try to keep toys and books organized using shelves, bins, baskets or boxes. This will help your kids easily find what they want.
- Try to rotate your child's toys so they have the opportunity to play with a wide variety of toys. Toys that have been packed away for a couple weeks are like new when you bring them out again!
- When you're going out with your child, take a toy or book with you – this will help keep your child busy while you are doing other thing.
- Have books available throughout the house so your child can play with and look at them at any time. This encourages independence, and it can also help you remember to work "book time" into the day.

General Schedules and Routines:

- Daily routines are just the daily activities you do with your child. Try to establish daily routines, such as having book time after bath, playing outside, or folding laundry together (even if your child just plays with the socks!).
- Build in small routine activities into your day on a regular basis – everyday, or almost every day, so your child knows what to expect. For example, try singing a favorite song in the car each time you go out.
- Remember that playing helps children to grow healthy and strong. Encourage play time every day.
- Remember that following the daily routines helps your child to become more independent.
- Follow a regular schedule of activities throughout the day that becomes familiar to your child.

Play Activities:

- Try to put preferred toys out of reach but within view, so to encourage your child to request them.
- Children are more likely to communicate about things they can see, feel, or find easily. Have a place where toys and books can be easily found and used.
- To increase the likeliness your child will talk about their toys, place some toys where they are easy to see.
- To keep toys interesting and give your child new things to talk about, get two tubs for toys and rotate which tub you have out. Toys that have been packed away for a couple weeks can be like new again!
- Get down on the floor with your baby so they can easily see and interact with you.

Following the Child's Lead Text Messages

General:

- Remember that the more opportunities a child has to interact with adults who follow their lead, the more opportunities you will have to teach and engage in communication.
- Talk or sing about the activities in which you and your child are involved.
- When your baby can see out the window, comment on what they might see outside by saying, for example, "I see a bird."

Play Activities:

- Notice what your child is interested in, looking at, playing with, and talking about. Using your child's interest provides opportunities for communication. Follow your child's lead in talking about their interests.
- Try to let your child direct your play together. Ask about your child's activity and how it should be played.
- Watch for what your child is interested in and join in.
- Ask your child to tell you how they want to play outside.
- If your child starts to look away or gets very squirmy, they may be telling you they are ready to play something else or take a break.
- If you are at your child's level when you play, it will be easier to identify what they are interested in him. Join your child in that activity.

Daily Routine:

- When out and about, watch your child to see what they are looking at, then comment about it.
- If your child has been fussy about clothes, try letting them take the lead. Provide a couple of weather-appropriate choices, and let your child choose which to wear.
- When doing chores, let your child choose between using a duster or a water bottle and cloth to clean up.
- When you have a routine that is very familiar to your child, you can pretend you are unsure of what to do next. This will allow your child to take the lead and come up with the next steps.
- During meal time, you can talk about the foods your child is choosing eat. You will be more likely to get a response from your child if you focus on what your child is currently doing.

Book Activities:

- If your child doesn't seem interested in the words in a book, make up your own. Change characters names, have them do something different.
- If you see your child picking up a book, ask your child if you can read with them.
- When reading, don't be too quick to turn the page. If your child is still examining the page, you can talk about the pictures together. Then, let your child turn the page when they are ready.
- If you let your child turn the pages when reading, you can easily tell when your child is done examining the pages and ready to move on.

Commenting & Labeling Text Messages

General:

- Talk about your daily routines, such as diapering, meals, or clean-up. “Comment” by describing what you are doing together.
- When you comment and label, you give your baby the opportunity to hear how we talk about our surroundings and our actions, teaching the correct labels for the actions and objects your baby sees or plays with.
- Teach your child different names for objects. For example, if your child says “my tummy” you can respond, “Yes it is your stomach.”
- Describe your child’s actions as they are doing them or as you are helping your child. Be the narrator.
- When children explore their world, they need new words to talk about what they see, touch, taste, smell and hear. Teach these words by “labeling” them.

Play Activities:

- When your child is playing ball you can say “You’re playing ball,” or “You are bouncing the ball so high.” This is Commenting and Labeling.
- Do some finger painting. Talk about the colors and shapes your child is making.
- While your child is playing, describe what your child is doing. Name toys, actions, or feelings.
- Name and describe the toys or materials your child is playing with.
- Whether digging in dirt or running around in circles, describe the action your child is doing.

Daily Routine:

- Allow your child to tell the sequence of diapering tasks or label body parts.
- Talk about the foods your child is eating.
- While you dress your child, you can name your child’s clothing and at the same time you can talk about the parts of the body, for example, “Here is your sweater. Here is one sleeve, and here is your arm. It goes through here.”
- While you are changing diapers, you might say each part of the body, like “head,” “toes,” “fingers.”
- If you find your child watching you put away the dishes, label your actions (“I’m putting the cups in the cabinet.”) and talk about the items (“Here’s a spoon for stirring. It goes in here.”)
- Pick up a free pet magazine at the grocery store and talk about the pictures with your child.
- When going out to eat, bring a book with you so you and your child have something to talk about while waiting for your food.

Book Activities:

- If your child is holding a book, acknowledge your child’s interest by saying, “Oh, you want to read this book about dogs. Ok, let’s read.”
- Cut out familiar pictures from magazines to make a picture book to talk about.
- Sometimes it is more fun for toddlers to talk about pictures in books, rather than reading all of the words on a page each time. Try to allow your child to choose how you look at books together.
- When your child is looking at books independently, you can look over and comment on what your child is looking at.

Imitating & Expanding Text Messages

General:

- Expand by restating what your child has said, and then adding a little more information
- If your child's vocalizations or words are unclear, imitate, but use the correct form to help them learn new ways to say things.
- Remember to imitate the sounds your baby makes. If your baby says "ba ba ba," smile, make eye contact and say "ba ba ba."

Play Activities:

- When your child makes a sound while swinging (like "wheee!"), expand on it by saying something like "Wheee, swinging is so much fun!"
- Toddlers might do a lot of reaching and pointing when playing outside. You can help by giving them the words to go with their actions. If your child is reaching up, you could say "Up, please."
- When your child says a single word when playing (like "ball"), you can expand by describing the ball or what it does ("It's a green ball." or "You threw the ball.")
- After your child draws a picture, ask them to tell you about it. When your child makes sounds or says words in response, repeat the words and add a little detail to their description.
- When playing outside, make fun sounds to go with your child's actions.

Daily Routine:

- Imitate what your child says during clean up. If your child says "Dinosaurs," you might say, "Yes, we are picking up the dinosaur and putting it away. Bye bye, dinosaur."
- At the grocery store, talk about what you are looking for and see if your child can help you find the items. When your child points at an item and makes a noise, say "Yes, you found the _____!"
- When your child labels a body part at bath time, you can expand on that. For example, if your child says "mouth," you can say, "You eat with your mouth!"
- When your child points to a food item and says "want" or a similar word or sound, you can say, "I want _____, please." This will show your child how to ask for things, and teach manners at the same time.

Book Activities:

- If your child points to a picture while looking at a book, name the object they are pointing at.
- When your child labels a picture in a book, you can tell them something new about the picture.
- If your child asks for a book by pointing or using a single-word to describe it, you can say "That book is called _____."
- When your child makes an animal sound when looking at books, you can imitate and expand on what your child is saying by making the sound and then describing it. For example, your child says "moo" and points to a cow. You can say, "Moo, moo. Cows says moo."

Asking Open-Ended Questions Text Messages

General:

- Ask questions that allow more than a simple “yes” or “no” answer. This encourages your child’s talk.
- An open-ended question provides many opportunities for children to practice talking – Where are we going? What should we do next? What color is that?
- While reading or playing, if your child doesn’t answer your question, you can simply answer it yourself and move on.
- Remember to listen and then ask questions. You’ll be more likely to get responses if you are paying attention to what your child is interested in. Comment and Label Happy, sad, mad? Give your child a simple “label” for the emotions they are feeling.

Play Activities:

- Ask your child what they are playing and if you can join.
- Ask questions related to your child’s game: “What are you playing?”
- When playing outside, use “hand binoculars” to spy different animals and birds. Ask your child what they see or what the animals are doing.
- When building together, ask your child, “What should I do next?” It can be fun to see what your child has to say.

Daily Routine:

- Ask questions about body parts during dressing or bath: “Where is your mouth?” or “Where are your toes?” Go ahead and name them yourself, if your child does not respond.
- Set out ingredients for baby-friendly trail mix in little bowls (small crackers or cereal, bits of banana). Let your little one be the chef and ask what they are going to put in next.
- Make a sandwich together with your toddler. Ask your child what goes on next? What should I do now?
- Let your child be “the one in the know.” Ask your child what you are supposed to do next. If they don’t know, help them out.
- When cleaning up, ask your child where the object goes. If your child doesn’t answer, give two choices: “Does it go on the shelf or in the trash?”
- After you are finished with a familiar routine, ask your child what happens next.
- Go for a walk. Ask your child what they see and hear.

Book Activities:

- When it is time to read together, ask your child what kind of book they would like to read.
- If older children or multiple adults are home, ask your toddler who they want to read to them.
- When reading, before your child turns the page, ask them what they think will happen next.
- Looking at books is a great time to ask your child “wh” questions. You can ask what your child sees or who is in the picture.

Praise & Positive Attention Text Messages

General:

- *Playing with your child gives them positive attention. Try to make some time every day to sit down together and just play, even if it's just a few minutes.*
- *If your child is looking at a book, sit by them and look at the book together. You might ask open-ended questions, or just listen to what your child has to say.*
- *Make a positive comment about your child's behavior and communication, such as "I like how you are using your words to ask for what you want."*
- *Giving positive attention to your child is important for their communication development.*
- *Smile, hug, or pat your child's back responding to their actions by saying, "You are playing so nicely with your friends."*
- *When your child uses a word or sign to label something, give positive attention by responding to what they have just said and talk about it.*
- *Catch your child being a good listener and let them know - "Thanks for listening!"*
- *Thank your child for using words to let you know what they need.*
- *Respond positively and quickly when your child does something that is difficult for them or does something new.*

Play Activities:

- *Praise your child when they are playing nicely. "Wow, you two are playing so nicely!"*
- *Encourage your child when they do things on their own. For example, "You went down the slide all by yourself! Great job!"*
- *Be specific when you tell your child what you like, so your child knows to do it again. For example, "I like how gently you are playing with your brother."*
- *Your voice can show how proud you are of your child. Describe what your child is doing in an enthusiastic tone and see how they respond.*

Daily Routine:

- *At dinner time, model table manners and provide the opportunity to praise by saying: "Would you please pass me the bread?" "Thank you for passing me the bread!"*
- *While you are changing your baby's diaper, you can tell them how nicely they are helping. "You're such a great helper!"*
- *If you need to cook, clean, or be on the phone, prepare in advance and have a fun activity planned for your children. Then, be sure to take breaks every so often to check in on them and let them know they are doing a great job playing by themselves.*
- *Sometimes babies have a lot of waiting to do. To encourage nice waiting, you can tell your baby how well they are waiting while you change their diaper or dry them after bath.*

Book Activities:

- *If you catch your child looking at books independently, be sure to let them know you like how they are reading books!*
- *If you've been working on page turning while reading, compliment your toddler for being gentle*

with the pages.

- *If your toddler hands you a book, you can encourage your child's positive behavior by saying "Thanks for sharing!" Make sure to find out if your child wants you to sit down and read with them, too.*
- *Babies will learn to love books if they see it gives them one-on-one time with Mom or Dad. If you see your baby holding a book, join them and see if they are interested in reading together.*

Providing Choices Text Messages

General:

- *If your child is not engaged with an activity, you can present a couple of choices. "Would you like to do this, or that?" This encourages communication and choice-making.*
- *Provide choices that allow your child to choose an object or activity in which your child is most interested.*
- *Providing choices helps children practice communicating their wants and needs. Try offering choices during play to help children tell you how they would like to play together.*

Play Activities:

- *When playing house with your toddler, you can ask if the baby is going to eat or play next.*
- *Art projects are a great time to practice making choices. If your toddler wants a new color, give them two different choices to pick from: "Do you want the blue crayon or the red crayon?"*
- *If your child looks like they aren't certain what to play with, hold out two different choices and ask which one they want to play.*
- *To practice choices when playing with shape sorters or multi colored blocks, you can hold out two different colors and ask, "Do you want the red shape or the blue shape?"*

Daily Routine:

- *Allow your child to choose the color of their cup by saying "Do you want the green cup or the blue cup?"*
- *To encourage healthy choices, give your child a choice between two different fruits at snack time.*
- *At bedtime, you can ask your child if they want to brush their teeth first or go potty first. This will give your child a little control over their bedtime routine.*
- *During mild weather, ask your child if they want to wear long sleeves or short sleeves when it's time to get dressed. Hold up the choices so your child can learn what "long" and "short" mean.*

Book Activities:

- *If your child brings you a book, ask if they want to read, or if they want you to read. If your child decides to read, listen intently and comment once in a while, so they know you appreciate their reading.*
- *If your toddler's attention wanders during story time, pick two different books and ask which one they would like to read.*
- *When reading, point to a picture and ask a simple question with two possible answers: "Is the ball green or red?"*
- *Give your child two choices about where to read. The choices can be silly, but make sure if your child chooses a silly choice, it is one that can actually be done. For example, "Do you want to read in the chair or under the table?"*

Time Delay & Fill in the Blank Text Messages

General:

- When your child wants something, pause for 3-5 seconds. If your child doesn't initiate communication, start phrases for them such as, "I want the..." and let your child fill in the blank.
- Give opportunities for your child to fill in the blank in a song or common phrase.
- Watch out for familiar songs, sayings, or topics throughout your day, and offer opportunities for children to "fill in the blank" during these familiar routines and activities.

Play Activities:

- When playing ball with your toddler, say "ready, set..." and pause to give your child the opportunity to say "go" before throwing the ball.
- Sit down on the floor and play "Row Your Boat" with your child. Sit feet to feet and hold hands. Pause your rowing mid-song to see if your child can fill in the blank. Then continue rowing.
- Toddlers like to show off their counting and color skills. Point to your child's toys and either count or label the color. Then point and pause to see if your child can fill in the blank with the correct color or label. If they don't or they are incorrect, simply say the word and keep going.
- Create a phrase to use when playing with action figures, then after modeling it, use fill-in-the-blank to get your child talking. You can teach your child to say hi to different animal or characters, and fill-in-the-blank with the name. You say, "Hi..." and pause so your child can say the animal or character name.

Daily Routine:

- Sing "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" during bath time. Pause to see if your child will provide the word.
- Remember to use time delay when your child is familiar with the routine and knows what to expect.
- Sing a familiar song in the car. Pause and let your child fill in the blank to keep the song going.
- When you are waiting in line at the store or in the car, sing "Old MacDonald had a Farm" and let your child pick out the animal and fill in blanks for animal sounds.

Book Activities:

- Look at books and point to a familiar item and say, "I see a..." and allow your child to fill in the blank.
- Read a familiar story and let your child tell parts of it by filling in the blank or talking about what happens next.
- Find a rhyming book that interests your toddler and read it often. Over time, you will be able to pause so your child can fill in the blanks at the ends of the rhymes.
- Teach your child to answer questions about books by following the question with a fill in the blank. For example, "What is the boy doing? He is..." and pause to give your child the opportunity to say what the boy is doing.

Using Questions in your Text Messages

Text message questions can be sent to ask about the parent's use of communication strategies with their child, about their general interactions, their child's behavior, or anything else you have been addressing in your visits. The purpose of these questions is to prompt parents to reflect on, and share their progress in using the strategies. You may select questions from this list and send them as they are written here or you may individualize the message to address the specific needs and priorities of the family. Upon receipt of the parents' response, try to send a quick reply acknowledging their response (e.g., "Thanks").

Some examples of Text Message questions include:

Overall Communication

- Did you use a lot, some, or very few communication strategies (labeling, imitating, choices, etc.) today?
- How much did you talk with your child in daily routines today?
- During (meal, clean-up, bath, dress, going out, etc) today, which communication strategies did you use the most?
- How did your communication with your child go today (during _____)?
- How well do you feel you understood your child's needs and wants today?
- Please tell us one specific praise statement you have used with your child recently.
- What is one choice you gave your child this week?
- How helpful are you finding the communication strategies? Are you seeing changes in your child's communication?

Specific Activities

- Did you communicate a lot, some, or not very much with your child during (snack, diaper change, playing outside, bedtime, etc) today?
- How much did you follow your child's lead during play today?
- How did ____ go today? (play, meal, driving to school, etc; specify the activity parent chose to practice) (response could be a lengthier text message)
- Have you used your communication strategies with a new activity recently? What was that activity?
- Is there a new activity you would like to increase communication during? What is that activity?
- Did you use fill-in-the-blank during reading or singing today? What happened?

Communication Cards

- How many activities from communication cards did you use today (or this weekend)?
- What activity from the communication cards did you try out in the past week? (Respond with the activity title.)
- Have you made up any fun new activities to enjoy with your child?
- Did you try doing the activity we talked about at our last visit, (name activity)?
- How was your child's communication during _____ (activity) this week (or today, or over the weekend?)

Child's Behavior

- *How was your child's interaction today?*
- *What is one of your child's favorite places to go on errands?*
- *What is your child's favorite play activity? Books, toys, outside, coloring, other?*
- *What chores does your child like to help with? Cooking, laundry, picking up toys, dusting, vacuuming?*
- *What new thing has your child learned this week?*
- *What is the cutest, sweetest, or most surprising thing your child did this week?*
- *How did your kids get along today? (only if there are siblings)*
- *What new skill would you like to see your child learn?*
- *Are you seeing some changes in your child's interaction or communicating?*
- *Was your child able to communicate their needs to you today?*
- *How was your child's mood today: frustrated, content, or happy?*

Supportive Text Messages

Messages that are not related to PC TALK can be sent every so often to offer a “break” from intervention related messages throughout the rest of the week and maintain interest and engagement. These types of messages can inspire motivation, build upon relationships, provide support, offer suggestions for fun family events or helpful resources, or just lighten the mood on a tough day. These text messages can be general messages that all families might appreciate, such as tips for fun community activities, or individualized to apply to topics discussed with the parent. When sharing links to sites that are external to your organization, check first to be sure they are appropriate for the families your organization serves, and that the links are current and functional.

Examples of non-intervention related text messages:

- *Friendly jokes, tips, or riddles that parents can ask their children, such as “knock-knock jokes.”*
- *Fun parent-child activity ideas, such as art projects or play activities.*
- *Quotes, inspirational sayings, self-care messages, and thought-provoking questions. For instance, if the parent has a job interview, you might wish the parent good luck in her interview later that day, or ask how it went, the next day.*
- *Prompts about information available to families, such as news topics, podcasts related to parenting, informative web sites or mobile applications.*
- *Suggestions for healthy, inexpensive snacks. Share links, pictures, or simple descriptions to easy-to-make, healthy, inexpensive snacks.*
- *Community services – health fairs, hospitals, clinics, community drives, sales, libraries,*

library events.

- *Sales, garage sales, consignment sales.*
- *Restaurants that have “kids eat free” days.*
- *Suggestions for upcoming fun and free activities in the community, such as information on local parks, parks with areas geared toward infants and toddlers, or parks with adaptive and accessible playground equipment. Consider low-cost events, such as libraries or health departments.*

Considerations for Choosing a Tool

There are many factors to consider when choosing the tools you use for text messaging within your organization. It will be important for programs to develop a plan for implementing and sustaining text messaging as part of your program services, as well as policies that ensure that text messaging works as an acceptable and effective tool for providers and families.

Programs may choose to seek out a text messaging “service.” These are generally web-based text messaging services, to which programs subscribe. Subscriptions are generally structured around a monthly fee, or a fee per a certain number of text messages. These programs are generally affordable and offer some advantages over texting families directly from provider mobile phones. Using a text messaging program is generally time efficient. Text messages can be sent in “batches” to a group of families, scheduled to arrive later in the week, and for some programs, a record of sent text messages can be downloaded for record-keeping purposes. Web-based text messaging programs may also be beneficial for when text messages are directed to families from multiple providers (i.e., a physical therapist and an occupational therapist working with one family), or when there is a need to provide program-wide communication (e.g., cancellations due to school district snow days).

Providers may text directly from cell phones. Text messaging from individual provider mobile phones means that most providers will be familiar with the technology, and providers will receive messages from families promptly, without logging in to a texting program or another application. Scheduling and rescheduling of visits may be easier because of the immediacy with which messages are delivered. The disadvantage to providers using their own phone is privacy, and text messaging taking place outside of the provider’s work hours. Some programs may provide mobile phones to their providers, which may mitigate some of these issues when providers “turn off” their work cell phone at the end of the day.

In establishing text messaging as a communication tool, providers and programs will need to communicate to families expectations about how text messaging will be used. For instance, will text messaging be the primary means of scheduling and rescheduling visits, and managing cancellations? What should families expect with regard to how text messaging will be used to share educational or intervention information? How often will text messages be sent? Specifically, programs should set clear expectations about how soon families can expect to receive text messages replies, after they have sent a text to their provider. For instance, a program may communicate to families that they might expect a reply within two business days, so families do not have the expectation of an immediate response from their provider, or that their provider may not answer text messages during “off” hours.

With any method you choose for sending text messages, it will be important to attend to issues of privacy and protecting families’ personal information. It will be important to communicate that personally identifiable, or personal data or information should not be shared via text message. It is recommended that text messages do not contain information such as names, dates, addresses, dates of birth, diagnoses, or other personally identifiable information. Review your organization’s rules and policies regarding privacy and texting before beginning a text messaging initiative.