What is Facilitated Communication?

Facilitated communication (FC) (also referred to as facilitated communication training, FCT) is a form of Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) in which people develop their pointing skills for communication, utilizing pictures, symbols, letters and/or words.

Facilitated communication training is useful for teaching individuals who cannot speak or point reliably due to neuro-motor problems such as impulsivity, regulation of movement, poor eye/hand co-ordination, and difficulty with initiation and sustainment of movement to develop effective pointing skills.

The method involves a communication partner, typically called a facilitator (e.g. teacher, speech pathologist, friend, parent) providing multiple methods of support that may include, but are not limited to the following:

1. **Physical Support**

Physical support may include the following: assistance in isolating the index finger; sabilizing the arm to overcome tremor; backward resistance on the arm to slow the pace of pointing or to overcome impulsiveness; a touch of the forearm, elbow, or shoulder to help the person initiate typing; or pulling back on the arm or wrist to help the person not strike a target repetitively.

2. **Emotional Support**

Emotional support involves providing encouragement, but not direction, as the person points to communicate.

3. **Communicative Support**

Various forms of prompts and cues to assist the FC user to stay focused in the communication interaction, to provide feedback to the FC user on the content of their message, and to assist the FC user in clarifying unclear messages.

The typed communication with the multiple forms of support provided by the facilitator allows the FC user to communicate messages that differ in their complexity and usefulness than the FC user's use of speech alone. This support is highly individualized and based on specific needs. Thus it does not look the same from person to person. For example, Luke receives support at the hand with strong backward pressure after each keystroke. Megan types with a light touch on the shoulder. Rebecca types with one hand; Shaffer works on developing a rhythm with two-handed typing.

This diversity of supports and styles of typing complicates any understanding of facilitated communication as a prescribed *method.* Instead it is a dynamic and long-term *process* of identifying, implementing, and evaluating communication supports according to Facilitated Communication Training Standards.

The goal of facilitated communication is for individuals to achieve independent typing, often with a combination of typing and speech (Crossley, 1994).

People who use FC successfully often use it as part of a total communication approach. It is used in combination with other methods of communication including speech, sign, gesture systems, etc. This enables the person access to the fullest range of communication options.