

About Makaton

Can you imagine what it would be like if you couldn't understand speech? How would you cope?

It's a situation which is similar to the one you might experience if you were in a foreign country and couldn't speak or understand the language.

What would you do? You would probably begin to gesture to explain what you wanted, and hope that others would understand your gestures and would gesture back. You might also start to draw pictures and diagrams to help get your messages across.

Makaton combines all these elements in a highly successful teaching approach.

How was Makaton developed?

Firstly a research project identified the words that we all use most frequently and need in everyday conversation. Then signs from British Sign Language, used by the deaf community in this country, were matched to these words, so that as you speak you sign and speak at the same time. Signs are often pictorial and convey the meaning more easily than words, which are more abstract.

How is Makaton used?

Makaton users are first encouraged to communicate using signs, then gradually, as a link is made between the word and the sign, the signs are dropped and speech takes over.

This might surprise you, as you would perhaps think that signing would prevent speech developing. But research suggests very strongly that this is not the case. In fact the opposite occurs, as signing seems to positively encourage speech development. Many hundreds of thousands of children and adults have been helped significantly in this manner.

Why does Makaton use symbols too?

Makaton symbols support the written word, in the same way that signs support speech .

Makaton Symbols have been specially designed. Most of them are black and white pictures illustrating the important meaning of the words we use. Children and adults who cannot read or write can now have, for example, stories, instructions to carry out tasks, timetable events, shopping lists, letters and messages, all written in symbols.

Furthermore for some children and adults, combining symbols, signs and speech together is proving to be an effective way of developing literacy skills.

Who uses Makaton?

Makaton is an internationally recognised communication programme, used in more than 40 countries worldwide.

Most Makaton users are children and adults who need it as their main means of communication. But everyone else who shares their lives will also use Makaton. These include the families, carers, friends and professionals such as teachers, speech and language therapists, social workers, playgroup staff, college lecturers, instructors, nurses, and psychiatrists.

However, it doesn't stop there. Makaton is rapidly spreading into the wider community, with requests for training to use signs and symbols from supermarket staff, youth groups, theatre groups, bus drivers, the police, museum staff, people working in sports and leisure, faith communities etc.