

Supporting Our Non-Speaking Equestrians

Presume competence. Believe that they can and assume they want to learn. Your belief matters. Just because they communicate differently, doesn't mean they don't understand you.

Talk to them – not around them. Speak to the rider, even if they don't speak back. They are listening. Introduce yourself, ask questions, ask for permission, and offer them choices.

Watch facial expressions and body language – mirror them as appropriate. Connection often begins with shared non-verbal cues.

Notice their gaze or interests. Where they look, what they reach for or what they do can tell you what they're thinking about or drawn to.

All behavior is a form of communication. If you're unsure what a behavior means, get curious—not frustrated.

Use the rider's preferred method of communication. Whether it's gestures, a device, visuals, or a support person—follow their lead.

Get permission before holding, touching, or using their AAC device. Respect their space and tools as an extension of who they are.

Allow extra space and time for their response. Processing and expressing takes time. Silence is not disinterest.

Scripting or echolalia is communication and is supporting their processing, self-regulation or its their way of socially interacting.