

# Beyond speech alone:

*GUIDELINES for practitioners providing  
counselling SERVICES to  
CLIENTS WITH disabilities and  
complex communication NEEDS*

**Presented by Jo Watson and  
Teresa Iacono**



# The Bridging Project

- Collaboration between Scope Specialist Services and the Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria, Monash University
- Aims to progress knowledge and resources so as to increase access to quality services for people with complex communication and mental health needs

[www.bridgingproject.org.au](http://www.bridgingproject.org.au)

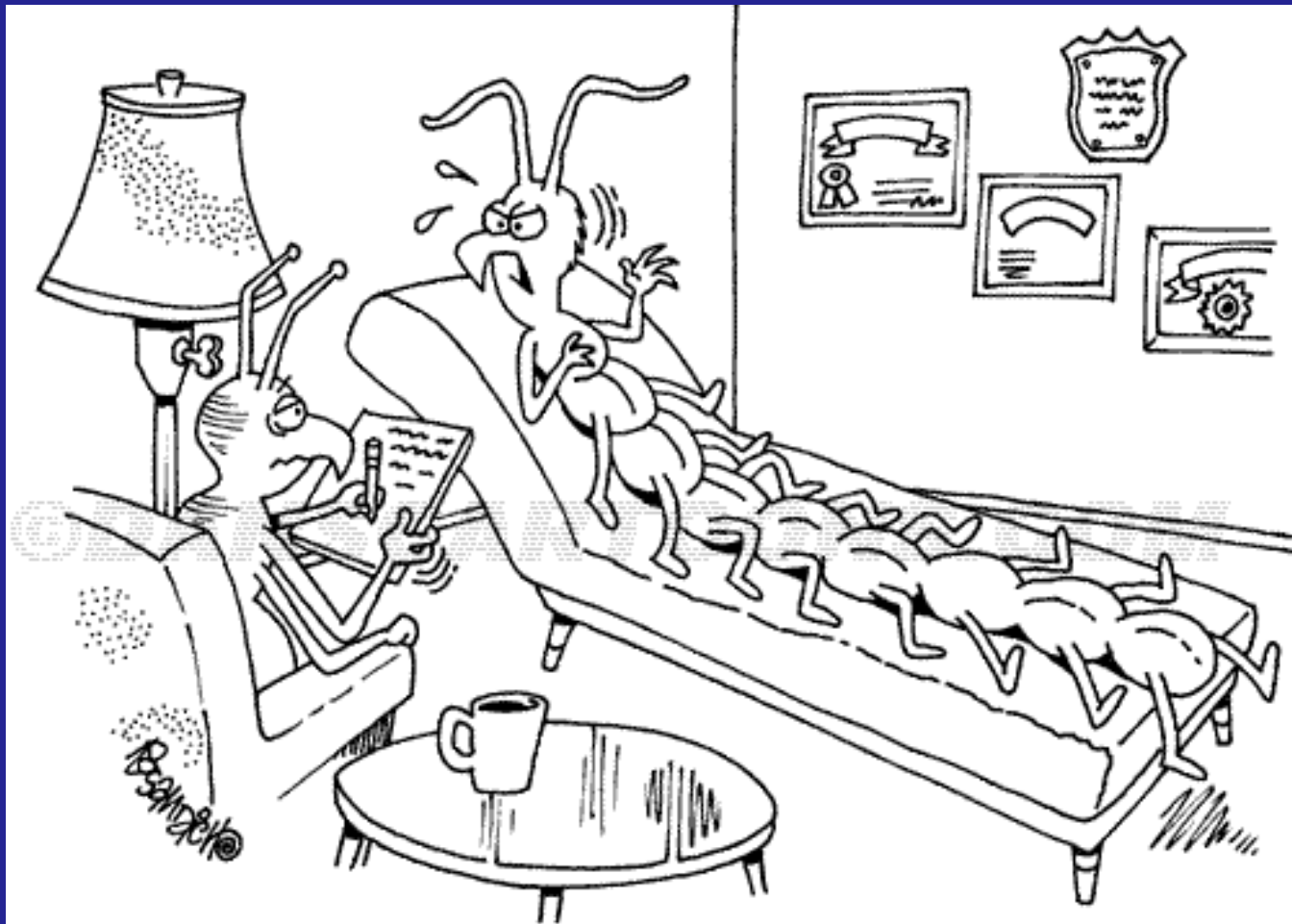


# Counseling

‘Counseling differs from general help-orientated discussion in that it is a formalised exchange of dialogue, which has as it’s foundation a therapeutic framework’

Hagiliassis, Di Marco, Gulbenkoglu, Iacono, Watson  
2006





***"Put my best foot forward? That's easy for you to say!"***

# Counseling

‘Most leading models of counseling are based on speech and listening processes.’

(Hagiliassis, Di Marco, Gulbenkoglu, Iacono, Watson  
2006)



# Disability and counselling

## Historically ...

- Focus of psychological intervention for people with disabilities has been behavioural
- Approaches have implied the principle of 'controlling': e.g., medication, restraint and seclusion

# Disability and Counseling Currently ...

- Increased focus on understanding “why people behave the way they do”
- However, the need for counselling continues to be overlooked.



‘Research regarding how the presence of complex communication needs impacts on the counselling process is decidedly lacking’

(Di Marco & Iacono, 2006)



## Disability and counselling: research

- Large body of literature for people with intellectual disability
- Progression of research from anecdotal to more rigorous investigations
- Criterion shift from “*is counselling relevant?*” to “*is counselling effective?*”
- Evidence is patchy, but suggests counselling is both relevant and effective.

# Barriers to advancement in research and practice

- Diagnostic overshadowing
- Behavioural overshadowing
- Challenge in diagnostic accuracy
- Perception that people with disability are 'protected' from mental ill health
- Socio Economic barriers that limit access to counselling



# Barriers to advancement in research and practice

- People with disabilities less likely to self-refer
- Discomfort around working with this group (Bender 1993)
- Assumption that people with disabilities lack the capacity to benefit from counselling

- Limited assessment tools that are accessible to people with complex communication needs;
- The need to modify or adapt counselling to make it accessible;
- Lack of education and training (Lowry 1998);
- Few clinicians with an interest in this field.

## The Guidelines ....

- Describe approaches for making counselling maximally accessible to people with complex communication needs, whilst maintaining the integrity of the counselling process.
- Targeted at psychologists in community settings
- Not approached from the perspective of a specific theoretical orientation
- Developed in collaboration with speech pathologists



# Relevance to AGOSCI?

- To increase awareness
  - ┌ That people with CCN are at risk of mental health problems;
  - ┌ Of AAC professionals' role and responsibility to refer to appropriate services;
  - ┌ That people with CCN have a right to access services;
  - ┌ That AAC professionals have a clear role in supporting the counseling process.

People with Complex  
Communication Needs experience  
a similar spread of mental health  
disorders compared with people  
from the general population

(Hagiliassis et al., 2005; Jenkins &  
Gulbenkoglu, 1998)



**Hagiliassis et al hypothesise  
that 'People with CCNs are  
less likely to have a mental  
health problem detected and  
treated in the early stages'**

**(Hagiliassis et al 2005)**



## People with CCNs may experience a distinct cohort of psychosocial stressors, in contrast to people without CCN

- Lack of control
- Limited access to communication systems
- Fewer social supports/ relationships (Kennedy et al 1990)
- More physical health problems (Beange, et al 1995)
- Poverty and social exclusion increases risk of mental illness (Eric Emerson 2007)
- More vulnerable to abuse and crime (Blake Huer & Bryen 2003)



**How can AAC specialists  
and users support the  
counseling process?**



# General Guidelines

- Familiarity with system
- Communication assistant
- Time
- Positioning
- Communication styles
- Pausing
- Honesty
- Be comfortable with silence
- Physical reflexes
- Fatigue
- Unpacking phrases

- Become familiar with the developed Guidelines;
- Promote the Guidelines with the Psychologists and counsellors you work, or receive services from;
- Promote the Guidelines with Psychologists who are employed in generic services;
- Look for training opportunities

# Open Questioning

Even when counselling people with complex communication needs, the first-line approach remains with open-ended questions where practical and appropriate

Hagiliassis, Di Marco, Gulenkoglu, Iacono, Watson  
2006



# Reliance on closed questions

- A reality for people who rely on limited message sets
- Challenge is to ensure that the responsibility of the dialogue remains with the client
- Use closed question openers (eg. Is there anything else that is bothering you?)
- Start general and become specific
- Have access to vocabulary resources relevant to the discussion
- Use Talking Mats



## Example of Yes-No counselling sequence

- Is there something you want to talk about? (Opener) **Y**
- Is it about something at home? (Location) **N**
- Is it about you? (Who) **N**
- Is it about someone else? (Who) **Y**
- Is it about someone at home? (Who) **N**
- Is it about someone at work? (Who) **N**
- Is it about someone in your family? (Who) **Y**
- Is it about your Parents? (Who) **Y**
- Is it something that has happened recently? (Time) **Y**

## Supporting the Counseling process

- Assist the counselor to understand the client's linguistic skills – including ability to understand and express complex concepts;
- Develop vocabulary relevant to the focus of counseling;
- In collaboration with the counselor, develop pictorial templates for common action strategies used in counseling;
- Support counselors and clients in the use of Talking mats (Murphy and Cameron 2001).

## Feelings cards



Happy



Sad



Scared



Proud



Worried



Angry



Excited



Surprised

**Anger Management  
Training Package**

**Gulbenkoglu & Hagiliassis,  
2006**

**Helpful/unhelpful ways of dealing  
with anger cards**



Finding someone  
to talk with



Getting help to  
solve the problem



Going to a quiet  
room



Hitting someone



Keeping your feelings  
bottled up



Kicking the wall

**Anger Management Training  
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**Gulbenkoglu & Hagiliassis,  
2006**

## Problem solving tips



Find out what the problem is



Think about some things you can do to solve the problem

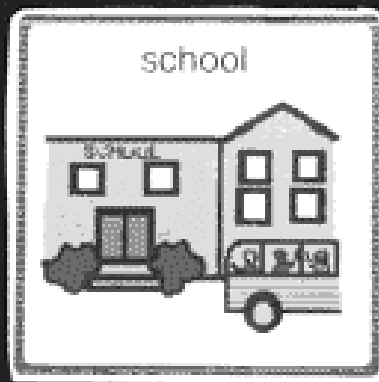
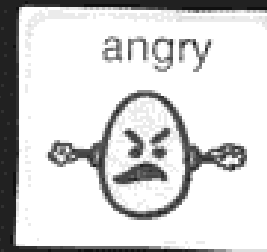
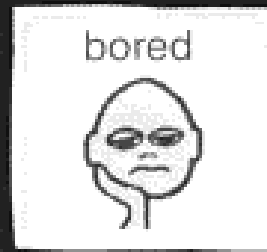
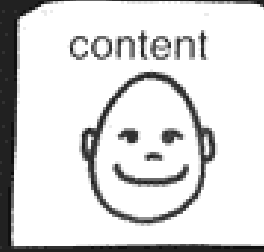


From all these choices, work out which is best

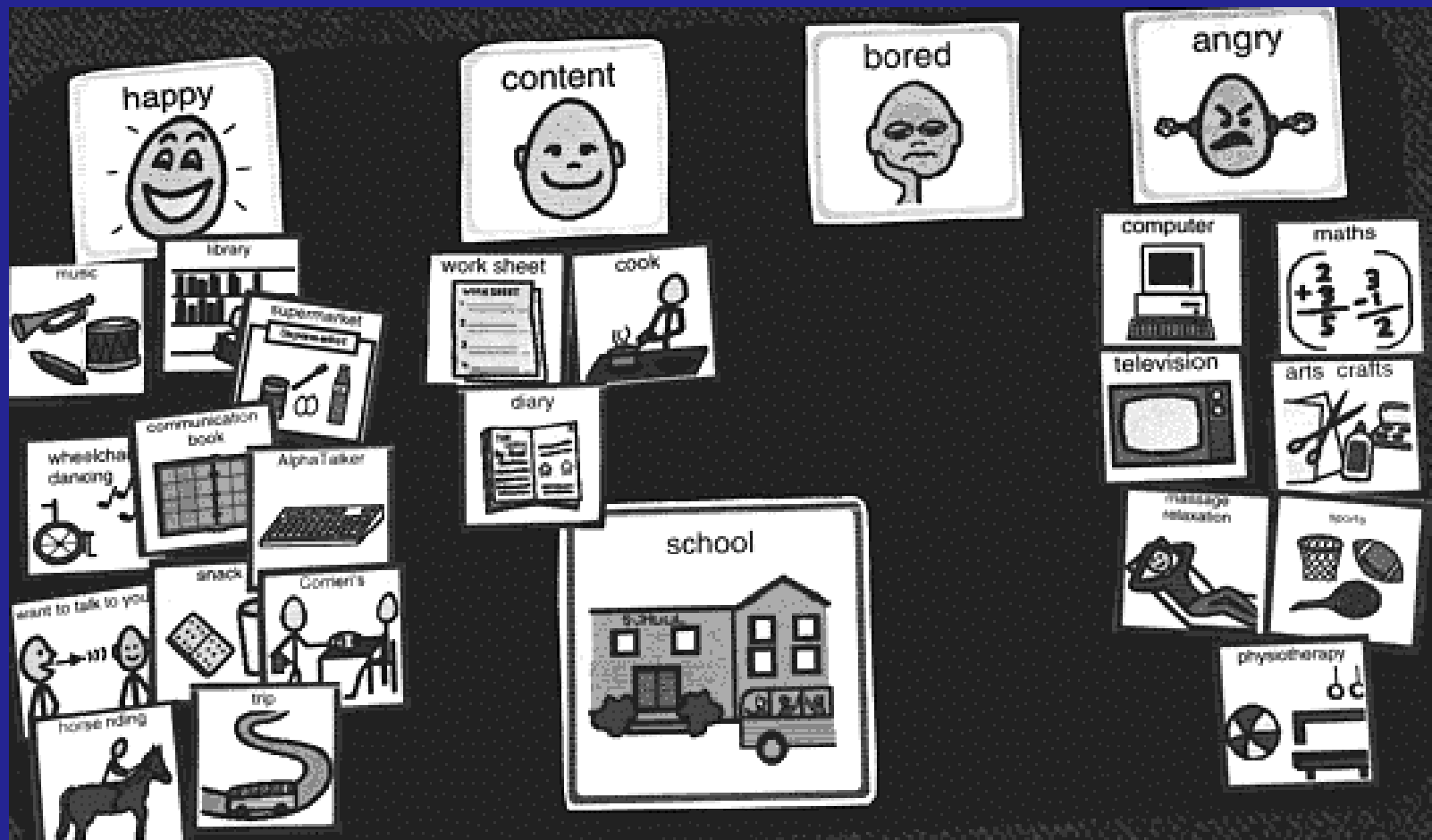


Try it and see how it goes

**Anger Management  
Training Package**  
**Gulbenkoglul & Hagiliassis**  
**2006**



**Talking Mats**  
**Joan Murphy**



Talking Mats  
Joan Murphy

## Future directions for the Bridging Project

- Policies that focus on strengthening access to generic services in communities for people with disabilities (e.g., Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012);
- Removing barriers that, ultimately, impede access to counselling services by people with disabilities e.g., financial, attitudinal, training;

- Further research into the types of psychosocial stressors experienced by people with complex communication needs, and the impact of these stressors on mental health outcomes;
- Development of assessment and intervention tools that are accessible to people with complex communication needs and that reflect the range of needs of people with disabilities;

- Bridging the divide between generic and specialist health services;
- Further focus on the counselling needs of people with limited literacy skills;
- Further investigation of the use of Talking Mats within a counselling context;
- Further focus on the development of vocabulary sets around Psychological counselling for people who do not use a generative AAC system;

- The development of an evaluation for the assessment of depression for people with complex communication needs;
- Accessible fact sheets;
- Guidelines for people with Complex Communication Needs to embark on the counselling process;
- Online counselling?;
- Development of a training package;
- Develop a conceptual framework for service delivery.

# Bridging Project Contact details

Further information:

[www.bridgingproject.org.au](http://www.bridgingproject.org.au)





**"Motherhood is wearing me out!"**