



## Recipe for a Hanging Out Café

Sheridan Forster

The Hanging Out Café is a get together and celebration of people who primarily use body, gaze, reach, sound, and movement communication. It has been inspired by the Hanging Out Program, principles of reverse inclusion, and the need for accessible environments for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD).

### Ingredients

- A large room where people can move around easily, booked for 3 hours (30 minute set up and pack up, with 120 minutes for the café)
- Some basic catering stuff – nothing too flash
- Some chairs
- Some handy resources that people can take away like the HOP booklet or copies of PMLD Link
- Up to 15 people with PMLD and their support workers
- Up to 15 people who are used to interacting with people with PMLD
- Up to 10 people who haven't had much experience being with people with PMLD (e.g., experienced peoples' partners, students)
- Many, many hours to advertise, explain, beg, beg again, convince people that "yes the person you

support sounds perfect to come along," and patience to deal with the many gatekeepers between the event and individuals with PMLD.

### Method

1. Get people to register for the event, including request for consent for photos.
2. On the day, set up the room. A table for some foods, a drinks area. Groups of 3 chairs spattered around the room (remembering that prolonged quality engagement has reduced likelihood if people are standing as opposed to sitting next to someone). A room with a quiet end and more active end can be useful.
3. Allow your 12-year-old son to plonk himself in a corner with his computer, knowing that even if he doesn't engage directly, just being there helps him

to be part of the disability community. Take up his suggestion that maybe he can bring some friends along next time to help out.

4. Expect people to arrive at different times. Welcome them. Be mindful of encouragements you might need to give to support workers to allow people to move about the room freely (to discourage hovering or well-meaning controlling behaviours that might be ingrained in their workplace culture).
5. Engage with people as they come in, or encourage other partners to engage.
6. Keep an eye out for anyone who might not be being engaged with.
7. Offer to make cuppas or show people where food is BUT it is critical that people know that the main ingredient of the experience is Hanging Out, not the food and drink. You do not want people coming in, eating, drinking, thinking they are done, and leaving – missing the best meal of the day of - engagement with another person.
8. Try to take photos.
9. Support experienced and inexperienced people to be able to engage – they might need ideas, highlighting of the focus of the individual with PMLD, ideas for sharing that focus, permission to play, or share silence. They might want to ask questions without feeling judged.
10. Be ready to support support workers, who may not have seen the level of engagement with the person that they support. They may have been in cultures missing good quality interaction.
11. Let people float in and out.
12. Go with the flow.
13. After pack up, send out photos of individuals to their contact person, so the celebration and modelling of great interaction continues on after the event.

### Comments

**R**esist the urge to overengineer. Before each Hanging Out Café you might be thinking of all the switch



equipment, toys, lights, vibrating things, and stuff that you can bring along. Perhaps bring along what you need to address your own sensory needs (my diffuser goes everywhere). Pulling out communication apps for picture sharing or YouTubing AC/DC is permitted. But resist the urge to complicate. Bring things back to basics – attending to the person in front of you. Don't get lost behind bells and whistles.

Be aware you may have a desire to orchestrate every item on the list, but this is not possible, so delegating photographing, trusting others to do things, and allowing yourself to share moments with people is needed.

Thanking those who attended the 2nd Annual Hanging Out Café. The Hanging Out Café has been an event run with AGOSCI Australia in celebration of International AAC Awareness Month in October. It is part run to highlight that body, sound, gaze, reach, and movement communicators need as much celebration as people using formal communication devices and communication books.

### Contact details

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### References

Forster, Sheridan (2008) HOP: Hanging Out Program: Interaction for people at risk of isolation.  
Available from: <https://sheridanforster.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/hop-a5.pdf>