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Guidance to help support your patient with voice and message banking

## Kent and Medway Communication and Assistive Technology (KM CAT) Service

August 2024

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# Message Banking

## What is message banking?

Message banking is the process of recording phrases, sentences or sounds. It can be done as an alternative or in addition to voice banking.

The messages will sound exactly like the person. Your patient may choose to bank messages that are personal and meaningful to them. Once the messages are recorded they cannot be changed (without re-recording).

Your patient may want to ask a friend or family member to message bank using their voice.

Unlike voice banking, message banking does not require a company to complete the process.

Currently the number of apps compatible with banked messages are very limited. It is not always possible to import and export messages into an app so please read the guidance below and consider when deciding if and how to message bank.

## How to record messages

For increased compatibility, we recommend recording audio in WAV or MP3 format. If possible save the audio file in both formats.

### Different ways/options to record messages:

* Voice recorder app: there are many free voice recorder apps available. On iPads there is the Apple app ‘Voice Memos’
* It is possible in some apps to message bank e.g. Predictable, Speech Assistant and Grid for iPad. It may not be possible to extract the audio file from the app so it will mean it can only be used on that software, (see 'Using banked messages’ below).
* Dedicated microphone/zoom recorder: These can be purchased online.
* Using a computer and microphone: Most computers have an audio recorder programme. Alternatively, there is free software available for recording and editing voice messages.

## What to record?

Thinking about what messages to record can be a bit daunting. They should be messages that are important for your patient to say in their own voice.

### Some ideas for messages to record:

* Greetings
* Family and friend names
* Common questions or instructions
* Jokes and catch phrases
* Sounds: whistles, laughing, sighing

Please view [this article by Boston Children's Hospital](http://www.childrenshospital.org/-/media/Centers-and-Services/Programs/A_E/ALS-Program/Message-bank-and-legacy-message-definitions-and-vocab-2017.ashx?la=en&hash=7F47DEAEB467FF2E6A92552575DBC6A341811CD0)for more ideas of messages to record.

## How to organise and store messages

* Make sure your patient keeps a backup of the audio in multiple places.
* Messages need to be labelled clearly and categorised in folders on a computer.

## Using banked messages

Unfortunately, there are not many apps available that are compatible with banked messages. It can be difficult to import and export sound files into an app. Bottom of Form

### Predictable app

* Importing messages (sound files): Your patient can record messages directly within the app or they can import messages via the Predictable account area on their website (MP3 or WAV formats). This can only be accessed via a computer not via iPad. They can also import messages organised in mymessagebanking.com
* Exporting messages (sound files): Your patient can export recorded messages from the app via the Predictable website. They can also export messages via iCloud Backup.

### Speech Assistant app

* Importing messages (sound files): Your patient can record messages directly within the app. They can also import voice recordings into the app via M4A, AAC, MP3 or WAV files.
* Exporting messages (sound files): Your patient can export recorded messages from the app via iCloud Backup.

### SpeakUnique free app

* Importing messages (sound files): Your patient can record messages directly within the app.
* Exporting messages (sound files): Individual messages can be sent via email (WAV files).

It’s important to discuss with your patient that there is a risk that data stored in the iCloud or via a company website account is not totally secure. If they are happy to take this risk it is still sensible for them to be cautious about what personal details are stored. For more information about this please give them a copy of our guidance: ‘Communication apps and your data’.

You can find the [Communication apps and your data guidance on the KM CAT web page.](https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/health-professionals/services/kmcat-for-professionals/)

# Voice Banking

## What is Voice Banking?

Voice banking is a process that allows a person to record a set list of phrases with their own voice, while they still have the ability to do so. This recording is then converted to create a personal synthetic voice.

If the person doesn’t have the ability to use their own voice they can use a voice donor, such as a sibling.

When the person is no longer able to use their own voice, they can use their synthetic voice in either a speech-generating app or using a specialist communication device. They will be able to say an infinite number of words and sentences.

The voice created will be synthetic and not be a perfect replica of the person’s natural speech, but it will bear some resemblance.

## Will voice banking work for everyone?

It is very important that a person whose speech might become harder to understand banks their voice early (for example someone with MND). This gives the best chance of success because words need to be said clearly as they are recorded.

It is possible to bank a voice with mildly slurred speech. However, it is important to understand that the voice that you get out will resemble the voice that's put in.

### Voice repair and bespoke voices

Some companies offer services for people who do not have clear speech, or who have noticed changes to their voice that they would not want reflected in their banked voice.

These services combine your patient’s recordings with pre-recorded or donated voice samples, and make other adjustments, to produce a clearer sounding voice. They can also make a totally bespoke voice using old recordings of a person’s voice or by using voice donors.

Some of the information above has been taken from the MNDA website

['What is voice and message banking?'](https://youtu.be/0WLs7iZuPNY) - a short video made by the MNDA

The Voice Banking Process

Your patient needs to:

* Sort out funding.
* Register with a voice banking provider.
* Ensure they have the correct recording equipment (laptop and USB microphone).
* Get started. An initial calibration/screening test will take place to confirm that the recording environment and microphone are suitable.
* If the test recordings are suitable, they can continue to record the remaining phrases. If not, the process may need repeating.
* Listen to a preview of their voice to check they like it. They can make small adjustments to it at this stage.

If they are happy with your banked voice payment is made.

Help them download their banked voice onto a communication device or a communication app and start using it.

## Getting started with Voice Banking

Your patient will need the following equipment:

* A laptop or desktop computer (reasonable new model).
* A USB microphone headset. This is the best option, because:
  + It maintains a constant distance between your mouth and the microphone.
  + Most computers produce poor sound recordings without a separate microphone.
  + A headset microphone is less likely to pick up ambient (external) noise.
  + It is best not to use a desktop or built-in microphone as the audio quality may not be acceptable.
* Wi-fi that works well.
* Google Chrome that's installed on the computer.
* A quiet room.
* Time to set aside to do the recordings.

## Voice banking - top tips for your patient

* Keep a record of login and password.
* Record in a quiet room.
* Re-record only if there is a loud noise nearby or you make a mistake.
* Record at the same time every day.
* To help their voice quality encourage them to sip water between recording sentences.
* They should speak at a consistent pace in a normal, non-exaggerated way.
* It may help them to listen to the sentence spoken aloud before they record it.
* It’s better to stop when they feel tired, save and record more later.

## Voice donation

Voice donation is creating a personal voice for someone else to use

Some things to consider before asking someone to donate their voice / agreeing to become a voice donor:

There is normally no payment to be a voice donor, donating (just as the word suggests) means it’s done for free.

The donor will need to record between 50 and 300 sentences in order for a voice to be created, depending on which company is used. This takes time and commitment.

The donor will need the correct equipment, quiet space and reliable internet connection to make the recordings.

The voice will sound like it has been made on a computer and not totally natural (listen to the sample recordings to hear some examples.) If the donor has a regional accent it will be present in the banked voice but it won’t be perfect. It is possible to adjust speed (to make the voice speak faster or slower) and pitch (to make the voice sound higher or lower). This can make it sound like your patient wants.

When they hear it, some people don’t want the voice created for them because they don’t like it. This also happens sometimes when people bank their own voice. Some people don’t mind if it sounds a bit unnatural, as long as it sounds a bit like they would if they could speak. They are happy to have a unique voice.

### **Choosing a voice donor:**

A family member, such as a sibling or a close friend may be happy to donate their voice.

There are a few practical decisions and discussions that must take place between the patient and their voice donor to ensure the process is as smooth as possible:

* Make sure the donor has all the facts about what is involved.
* Your patient will need to choose which company they would like to use.
* Your patient will need to sort out payment for the voice.
* The donor will need the correct equipment to use.
* Your patient needs to think about how they will preview the voice once the donor has finished recording.
* Your patient should have login and password details so they can officially ‘own’ the voice and download it onto a windows/iOS device to be used with communication software.

Alternatively, companies such as Speak Unique and VOCALiD have a bank of donors that they can use to blend with your voice or to create a unique voice.

## Finding a voice banking company

If your patient wants to apply for charitable funding, please inform them that they need to check which voice banking providers their chosen charity will fund, as this will dictate who they can use.

There are a number of voice banking providers. Some companies, such as SpeakUnique and VocaliD offer additional voice options, including ‘repaired’ synthetic voices for people whose speech unclear, or bespoke voices for people with no speech.

The links below to voice banking companies are for information purposes (including how many recordings your patient will need to make and the cost). No endorsement is expressed or implied.

* Acapela, My-own-voice: [www.mov.acapela-group.com](http://www.mov.acapela-group.com/)
* CereVoice Me: [www.cereproc.com](http://www.cereproc.com/)
* I will always be me (for people with MND): <https://iwillalwaysbeme.com>
* ModelTalker (Gen3 voice):[www.modeltalker.org](http://www.modeltalker.org)
* Personal Voice (Live speech feature) FREE: <https://www.apple.com>
* SpeakUnique:[www.speakunique.co.uk/](http://www.speakunique.co.uk/)
* VocaliD: <https://vocalid.ai>
* The Voice Keeper: <https://thevoicekeeper.com>

## Funding options

### Charitable Funding

The number of charities that will fund voice banking for people with a confirmed medical diagnosis continues to grow. If a charity is not listed below and your patient would like their support, we suggest approaching them directly in case they are able to help.

The charities below will fund voice banking. Your patient should contact them to arrange funding before they start to bank their voice.

* The MNDA
* The MSA Trust
* PSP Association will fund Speak Unique
* Ataxia UK
* Other options to try:
* Mouth Cancer Foundation
* Macmillan
* The Swallows

### Self-Funding

Some patients and families may choose to self-fund. Prices please refer to company websites for up-to-date details.

Patients who need to purchase a microphone to record their voice should refer to the website of their chosen voice banking company. They will advise on suitable ones to use. As a rough guide they cost about £30-40 and can be obtained e.g. from Amazon.

For more information – please see [KM CAT information on alternative funding for AAC](https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/health-professionals/services/kmcat-for-professionals/)

# Normal and voice banked voice samples

Here are some voice samples to help compare a normal voice with an off-the shelf voice and voice banked voices.

The four samples below are from Georgina, one of our Speech and Language Therapists. The first sample is Georgina’s normal voice, followed by alternative versions. You can compare the different samples to judge the difference between them.

### Transcript - for all voice samples:

‘Hello, my name is Georgina, and this is my (normal/Lucy AAC/Acapela/SpeakUnique) voice. I thought it was important to bank my voice so that I understood what it was like to go through the voice banking process. It also seemed like a good idea to offer my voice as an example to listen to. Whether or not to bank your voice is a very personal choice to make; I hope hearing my voice will help you to make your decision.’

### To play the samples:

Double click on the file to play the sample.

## Georgina's Voice (normal)



## Off-the-shelf Voice

* 'Lucy' is an off-the-shelf AAC voice which is widely available. There are a number of off-the-shelf voices - this is just one example, so that you can compare with my banked voices.

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## ****Voice banked with Acapela ‘My own voice’****

* Amount Recorded: 50 sentences
* Recording Period: 1 session
* Time Taken: 15 minutes



## ****Voice banked with SpeakUnique ‘Voice Build’****

* Amount Recorded: 300 sentences
* Recording Period: 1 session
* Time Taken: Just over 2 hours



# **Patients’ frequently asked questions:**

## ****What happens to my banked voice while I’m not using it?****

It’s stored safely by the voice banking company until you want/need to download it.

## ****How do I use my banked voice?****

You will need a speech generating device, also known as a communication aid, so you can use it for face- to-face communication.

## ****How will I know what communication aid to get?****

Your Speech and Language Therapist will support you with this. When it’s time for you to use a speech generating device you will be assessed and given a communication aid to trial. This is to make sure that what you get is what you need.

What you might need depends on many things, including your vision, head and hand movement and where you will be using your device.

## ****Can I use a speech generating device if my hands and arms get weaker?****

Yes, there are alternatives for people who are unable to use their hands/arms. If using a keyboard or touch screen becomes difficult, your speech and language therapist will refer you to your nearest AAC Service, where you may be eligible for assessment and equipment loan for face-to-face communication. In Kent and Medway this the KM CAT Service.

## ****Will I have to pay for my communication aid?****

There are various sources for funding communication aids, these include charitable funding (e.g. the MNDA) or NHS funding for long term loans and some other equipment in certain circumstances.

## ****What happens if my needs change over time?****

Your speech and language therapist and local AAC Service will support you to ensure you receive the best options so you can continue to communicate.

## ****I’m a long term AAC user with a loaned device from KM CAT and I’m currently using an off-the-shelf voice. I’m keen to have a banked voice so I sound more like my family and friends. Will I be able to use it on my communication aid?****

As a starting point, please contact KM CAT before committing to pay for voice banking, as not all communication aids are compatible. We will double check with your chosen voice banking company whether your new bespoke voice can be downloaded onto our communication aid.

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