

Choosing Vocabulary

Choosing appropriate vocabulary can sometimes seem more difficult than choosing a communication method. She will not be interested in using the device or method unless it contains vocabulary which is motivating and functional for her, and which she cannot communicate more easily in another manner. Stay away from using only words like "lunch", "bathroom" and "music." Make sure that anything available for her to choose can be acquired immediately. For example, placing "bus" on her device, which is only available at the end of the day, is useless at any other time. However, if going for a short walk is an option throughout the day, it might be more useful. It is best to start with specific activities, especially if the number of messages are limited. Sometimes simple talkers or communication boards can be set up in several places around the classroom or house, to be available for different activities. There is no reason she must be limited to having only a single talker available.

Pictures can be photos, magazine cut-outs, flash cards, or labels from favorite foods or music. In addition, there are computer programs such as Boardmaker, which can be used to generate pictures or icons. These days you can also scan in pictures to print off your computer.

Often teachers and therapists limit the number of choices based on how many pictures can be grouped together for a girl to identify one receptively. Just because she can deal with only two or three pictures at a time during an activity does not mean it is the maximum she should have on her communication system. When using the pictures is motivating she may be able to deal with a larger grouping for expressing herself. Generally, use of a system starts with pictures or icons (symbols) which contain complete messages, for example, "Blow more bubbles" and a picture of the bubbles jar. Later, depending on her coordination and abilities, it may be possible to separate out words so that she can build her own sentences. This works well on the more complex computer-like devices. She may also be able to go from screen to screen changing themes herself on these devices. You may have certain messages, such as "yes/no" or "I'm done", which go in the same place on every page or screen.

Here are some examples of vocabulary for talkers, communication boards, and eye gaze boards:

- During therapy time: "Pick me up," "Swing me around," "Bounce me on the big ball," "Rub my feet,"
- For the VCR: pictures of 2 choices of tapes, "Put it in the VCR," "Turn it on," "That's my favorite," "I don't like that one."
- What hurts: place pictures of any parts of the body which tend to hurt her, maybe starting with head, stomach and feet, then using "yes/no" to get more specific as you touch parts in the area she chooses and ask if each hurts.
- Circle time: "I am here!," "It's raining today," "My turn," "Let's sing my favorite song."
- Social: "Hi my name's _____, what's yours?" "How's it going?" "Come talk to me," "Have a good one," "See ya later," "He's cute."

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