



Communication - No Tech Methods

"No tech" methods include signing, using pictures and objects without voice output, facial and body language or eye gaze.

Body Language

In many respects, we share her handicap. We may find it more difficult to understand her than for her to understand us! When we speak to her, we can change our pitch or tone of voice to aid our expression. But, we may not know how to interpret her behavior, emotional expressions, body language or facial expressions.



Communication Boards

Communication boards can be a very functional and portable way to provide access to choices. They can be made out of anything from a manila folder covered with contact paper, to a foam board with a velcro strip along its length. They can hold objects velcroed on or placed in pockets, pictures, words, or any combination. Create them so that she can take pictures off and hand them to a caregiver, or point with her finger, nose, a head pointer or light. They can be placed on a lapboard to go with her, or placed in strategic locations around her classroom and your house. She can point to them by herself or with someone steadying her arm or head.



Generally, communication boards should be used expressively. A goal is to get her to initiate use of the board without always just responding to questions. A board can also be used to show academic knowledge, holding colors, letters, or words for her to identify when named. Remember to place social language, information about favorite people, etc. on boards whenever possible.

Calendar Boards

Calendar Boards or Boxes are similar to communication boards, but are generally used receptively. They contain pictures or objects which show the activities of the day. One might start with circle time, include therapies which occur that day (maybe a picture of the therapist), lunch, art, bus, etc. Her teacher can use a piece of cardboard with a Velcro strip, and each morning Velcro pictures or words depicting the schedule on the board. This can be discussed with her at the beginning of the day and before each change of activity. When an activity is finished, its picture or name can be placed in an envelope at the end of the board. Daily calendars can be extremely helpful with girls who are upset by changes and transition, since they can anticipate what comes next. They can also help teach sequencing skills.



Head Pointers

A head pointer can be a light attached to a visor or headband. Or an actual pointer can be connected to head straps made to fit firmly on her forehead or chin and angled so that she can touch pictures, words, letters, or a communication device as accurately as possible. A pointer can be very effective for a girl who has relatively accurate head movement, but little hand use. Make sure when using a pointer that the communication device is not held too close for her to see it accurately.

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Eye Pointing

Eye gaze or eye pointing can be a very good way to communicate, but is sometimes difficult. It may help to space things far apart or to place them in an up-and-down plane instead of side-to-side. There are a variety of ways to hold or place pictures or objects for eye gaze. Make sure she is positioned for maximum stability of her trunk and head so that her gaze can be accurate. Observe the direction she watches the best, down on a table, on a slanting board, up at eye level, mostly to the left, etc., and use this information for placement. If possible, teach her to look around at all the items until she sees what she wants, stares at it, then looks at your face to make it clear she has made a choice.

There are a variety of homemade and commercially made holders for eye gaze pictures or objects. An E-tran is large clear plexiglass board with a hole in the center or made in an open three sided shape for the other person to watch through. Items are attached around the outside, usually by using Velcro. A similar, but more easily portable holder can be homemade out of PVC pipe and velcro. It can be placed on a table or held, and tilted in the best direction.

Blinking

Parents are very creative in finding ways to use their daughter's most available movement for communication.

Using Yes and No

Make sure your questions are clear and concrete at first. Sometimes it helps to tell her both possibilities first, for example, "Do you want to stay home or go in the car?", then ask each separately to allow her to answer, and be ready to honor her choice. Generally it is best to keep the "yes" and "no" consistently in the same positions, rather than switching them, though some parents have found switching helpful in clarifying answers. You may want to consider introducing a third option of "maybe" or "I don't know" as sometimes the answer is not "yes" or "no".

Flash Cards

Using flash cards can be effective because they are big and have the words printed with the picture too.

Picture Exchanged Communication System (PECS)

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) can be used successfully with children who have a wide range of communicative, cognitive, and physical difficulties. It begins with teaching a student to exchange a picture of a desired item with another person, who immediately honors the request. It is important to note that what is on the picture being exchanged is not relevant at this point in time. What is relevant is that something is given and something is received in a token exchange system. Verbal prompts are not used, in order to build immediate initiation and to avoid dependency on prompting. The system is then used to teach initiation of communication at a distance, and then to teach discrimination of symbols, finally putting them all together in simple sentences. Eventually, the student is taught to comment and answer direct questions.

PECS needs to be done often. Teachers typically begin using it once a day, and once a routine is established, they build in other times during the day. If this system is being used, it is very important that the parent be trained in it as well and use it at home for maximum benefit. However, requesting is only one small part of communication and PECS should be combined with other methods of communication. PECS may not be effective with every child.