

Successful Adaptations for Learning to Use Touch Effectively

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COACTIVE SIGNING

Definition

Physical guidance of the child's hand(s) to facilitate production of a standard manual sign for expressive communication.

Purpose

To encourage the use of signs as expressive communication for the child who is blind or deaf-blind.

Examples

- Three-year-old Mariko is sitting in the swing. She shakes her legs when the swing stops. Her big brother takes her hands and helps her sign MORE (coactive signing) while saying "OK, you want to swing some more. I'll push you."
- Ten-year-old Carlos is sitting at the lunch table. He searches for his milk carton on the tray but cannot find it, so he touches his teacher. She helps Carlos sign MILK (coactive signing) and then says "The milk is on the counter, go get it" while she signs MILK ON COUNTER GET IT as Carlos feels her hand movements (tactile signing).

Considerations

1. The communication partner and child should be positioned so that they are both comfortable and able to produce signs.
2. Because the communication partner may vary in relationship to the child (i.e., beside the child, in front of the child, or behind the child), he or she should remember to facilitate sign production from the child's perspective. Care should be taken to consider the child's dominant hand in the production of signs.
3. Communication partners should differentiate between communication input to the child and output of the child and use coactive signs only to facilitate the child's expressive communication (output).

Advantages

- Children who are visually impaired or who are not visually attentive can kinesthetically feel signs being made tactilely. This may help in the child's independent production of signs.

- Coactive signing provides the child with a tactile- kinesthetic model for promoting expressive communication.

Disadvantages

- Coactive signing may be used inappropriately and confused with tactile signing.
- Coactive signing may not be effective for children who do not like their hands to be held and manipulated or who are limited in arm and hand movements.
- Over use of coactive signing may result in some children being dependent on physical prompts to produce signs.
- Children may have difficulty differentiating between messages from a communication partner (input) and when communication partner is facilitating the child's response (output). A child will be confused if coactive signs are used for both receptive and expressive communication purposes.
- In coactive signing, communication partners may confuse the direction and movements of a sign and produce the sign from their own perspectives and not from the child's perspective.
- Communication partners may reverse signs by using their dominant hands to mold the child's nondominant hand to produce a sign. This reversal be confusing and lead to the child's incorrect production of the sign.
- Not all manual signs can be produced accurately in a non-visual manner coactively, (e.g., signs that require finger movements such as WAIT).

Source

Coactive Signing represents a synthesis of information from Project SALUTE's focus groups, National Advisory Co, staff activities, and a review of relevant literature such as the following bibliography.

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