

Successful Adaptations for Learning to Use Touch Effectively

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OBJECT CUE

Definition

An object or part of object used to refer to a person, place, object, or activity.

Purpose

To provide a concrete means of supporting conversational interactions and language development.

Examples

Whole objects

- A cup is used to mean "Snack time, go to the table"
- A diaper is used to mean " Let's change your diaper"
- A backpack is used to mean "Here's the bus. Time for school"

Parts of objects

- A section of straw signals "Snack time"
- The cardboard toilet paper roll signals "Let's go to the bathroom"
- A piece of chain from the swing signals "It's recess. Go play outside"

Considerations

1. Consider whether the child has the physical ability to actively explore and manipulate objects to determine whether object cues are an appropriate communication support for this child.
2. Select object cues that the child can manipulate and that have a close tactile relationship to their referents.
3. Avoid the use of miniatures since their relationships to referents are visually based.
4. When possible, choose small objects or parts of objects so the communication system is more portable.
5. Write the intended message clearly on the object or display to clarify the communication intent for all communication partners.
6. Display object cues should be displayed so that they are accessible to the child and used consistently by communication partners, (e.g., in a calendar

box, on a communication board, in a binder separated in categories, or as a landmark for the place to which the object refers).

7. Touch and handle objects with the child (see [Mutual Tactile Attention](#)) and engage in nonverbal and verbal conversations about activities that the objects represent. For example, show the child the chain from the swing; touch it together; act out swinging and invite the child to feel your actions. Sign SWING tactilely. Notice the child's reactions and respond.

Advantages

- Object cues provide a concrete and static communication method that may be easily understood by the child who needs support in understanding abstract symbols, such as speech or sign language.
- An object cue makes relatively low demands on the child's cognition, memory and representational skills. Initially, the object cue can be the same object that is used in the actual activity so the child will understand its meaning. The child just needs to discriminate it from one or more other [tangible symbols](#).
- The use of an object cue requires a simple motor response, such as pointing, touching, picking up, showing, or looking at it to make the message clear.
- The size of the object can be reduced over time to a small part of the object to increase portability.

Disadvantages

- The use of object cues is not a conventional communication method so everyone who interacts with the child may not use them consistently or in the same way.
- The use of whole objects may not be portable.
- Abstract and complex messages cannot be communicated solely through the use of object cues.
- Finding the appropriate object or part of an object to refer to a person, activity, or item can be very challenging.

Strategies

Ways to Offer Objects

- Determine the best way to offer an object to a particular child and the child's preferred position for examining objects. Some children will examine objects placed on a tray or on their laps. Other children with physical disabilities may prefer to examine objects placed on their chests while they are lying on their backs.
- Offer an object by touching it to a body part (e.g., arm) that is less sensitive than the child's palm. Watch for a response. If needed, repeat the offer and accept a negative response (e.g., a push away). Offer something else. The rejected object can be offered again later.
- To introduce a new object, hold it in your hand and place the back of your hand under the child's palm. Slowly rotate your hand with the object so the child will come into contact with the object gradually. This way the child can choose whether to remove his or her hand from the object, just touch it, explore it in your hand, or pick it up.
- To introduce something with a large surface (e.g., a book with textures or braille or a large object), put your hand on the surface and encourage the

- child to place his or her hand on top of yours. Slide your hand back gradually so that the child's hand comes into contact with the surface. Move your hand gently to explore the surface, thus guiding the child to do the same. This way the child is learning through [tactile modeling](#) and can choose the amount and length of contact he or she has with the surface.
- Offer objects that are interesting for the child to explore tactilely (e.g., contains discrepant textures or shapes, has moving parts that can be manipulated, provides some feedback based on the child's action).
 - Do not force a child to take an object or overuse hand-over-hand manipulation. This may lead to prompt dependency. Continuous physical manipulation communicates that "you need my help" and "I can make you do this."

Source

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

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