

Successful Adaptations for Learning to Use Touch Effectively

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What We've Learned

TEXTURED SYMBOLS

Definition

Textured symbols are tactilely salient, three-dimensional and artificial representations associated with people, objects, and activities and used for receptive and expressive communication. These symbols are individualized for each child and could be abstract or closely related to their referent.

Purpose:

To support receptive and expressive communication for a child who is a tactile learner.

Examples

- A piece of sandpaper represents, "Time to work"
- A piece of cardboard with hardened glue dots represents, "Time for a snack"
- A piece of plastic represents, "Time to go shopping".

Considerations

1. Textures for symbols should be selected based on the child's preferences and ability to discriminate them.
2. Selected textures must be salient and distinctive from each other.
3. Selected textures should maintain their saliency and surface uniformity when reduced in size or provided from a different perspective.
4. Each textured symbol should have its intended message written clearly on it to clarify the communication intent for all communication partners.

Advantages

- Can be individualized for each child's specific needs.
- Textures can be recognized without significant active exploration.
- The saliency of the textures may reduce the demand on memory and orientation.
- They do not need to be spatially oriented or have a reference point because the texture is uniform across the surface area (e.g., a corduroy square).
- Textured symbols are portable and relatively easy to display.

- They can be used with children of all ages and an accompanying print message can be easily understood by anyone who can read.
- Textured symbols can be presented to the body part that can discern them most efficiently (i.e., not just to hands).

Disadvantages

- Not a conventional system of communication and partner may not be comfortable using them
- Textured symbols do not necessarily possess the attributes of the referents they represent or have a clear perceptual relationship.
- There is no accepted standardized system of textured symbols because they are individualized for the child.
- A focus on textured symbols as the sole means of communication will limit interaction and conversation.

Strategies

1. Select a highly reinforcing and very specific referent (eg., crackers). Introduce the texture (eg., a square covered with dried glue dots) that represents the referent during consistent routines (eg., at snack time). Present this symbol every time the child can have the desired item.
2. Start with a large presentation of the texture (e.g., 8"x10") so the child can easily touch it. Begin with an action that the child can produce (e.g., put hand on texture).
3. Give the child the actual referent whenever he or she makes any contact (accidental or intentional) with the textured symbol.
4. Introduce each texture symbol by itself. Once the child understands the meaning of this new symbol then it can be used with others to offer a choice.
5. When the child consistently touches the symbol, reduce the size of the texture. Individual needs and abilities will decide the ultimate size of the texture.
6. Increase the number of textured symbols to represent different referents that are appropriate for the child's use.
7. A symbol without a referent can be used as a foil in teaching the child to make a choice. A foil is usually a smooth flat square the same size as the other textures. That is used to check the child's recognition of a textured symbol. If the child selects a foil, gently guide the child's hand to the display area so he can choose a texture that has a referent.

Source

Textured Symbols 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.

Bibliography

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Description

What We've Learned

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