

Successful Adaptations for Learning to Use Touch Effectively

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What We've Learned

TOUCH CUE

Definition

A touch made in a consistent manner directly on the body to communicate with a child.

Purpose

To communicate a variety of purposes (e.g., request, information, praise, greeting). Touch cues may reduce startle or inappropriate behaviors by helping the child anticipate what is about to happen. Touch cues signal the communicator's intent.

Examples

- Touching one side of the child's mouth means "Get ready to eat." (direction)
- Rubbing the child's right shoulder means "I like that." (praise)
- Touching the back of the child's hand means, "Here I am." (greeting)
- Touching the child's hair means "I am going to brush your hair." (information)

Considerations

1. If a child has a severe neurological impairment, the type and placement of touch must be carefully selected. In most cases, a touch cue that is firm is more effective than a light stroke. The child's physical and occupational therapist should be consulted.
2. Touch cues should be easy for the child to discriminate from other physical contact (e.g., when being positioned).

Advantages

- Touch cues are easy to develop and do not require formal instruction.
- The child does not need motor skills to receive touch cues.
- Touch cues can be individualized for each child.
- Touch cues support a child's communication and participation in familiar routines (e.g., a caregiver can give a child a touch cue, then pause and wait for the child to indicate readiness or anticipation of the next step in the routine).

Disadvantages

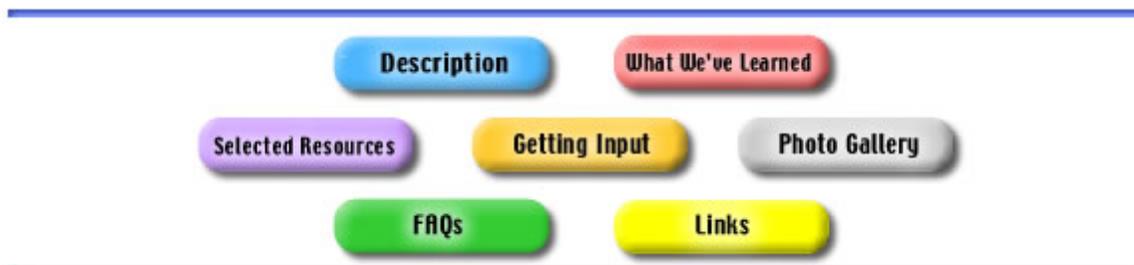
- The use of touch cues may be uncomfortable for the communication partner and the receiver because of differences in their age, gender, relationship, culture and experiences.
- Touch cues are limited to receptive communication and in the types of messages that may be conveyed (e.g., letting the child know what is about to happen, providing comfort, providing praise or making a request).
- Touch cues may not be used consistently or made in the same way by everyone who interacts with the child.
- Touch cues that are selected poorly or used inappropriately may startle or confuse the child.

Source

Touch 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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