

## Guidelines for creating effective communication systems for adults

1. Figure out the easiest position for viewing where he can move either his eyes or his head.
2. He doesn't have to look directly at a word – just in the direction of the word.

For example: if you have a YES stuck up on the wall in front of him and a NO on the floor, if you ask him a question, he can answer no by moving head or eyes down (not necessarily looking at the NO card) or yes, by looking straight ahead.

3. This is why the chart is constructed with columns and colours. Once he is familiar with the chart, he can look at a colour card to tell you which column and then you can use row numbers or just simply asking yes no to figure out which word.

Different colours also help him move his eyes from one to the other more easily. He may never look directly at a word, but we write big and bold so that even if he is not looking directly, he can see enough to read (you can try it – look at the space before a word and you will realize that you can actually read the word or enough that you can guess)

**start simple** - Once you have established a clear YES- NO response, pick any one chart – I usually start with Activity or Environment. Place it where it is easy for him to see and check if he is able to find the different words. For example, point to Too BRIGHT and ask “am I pointing to Too noisy, (yes or no) too cold (yes or no) too bright (yes or no) or too dry (yes or no)? “ You may find that you need the words to be bigger or wider apart.

Next, ask him I want to see if I can understand you, please look at Too Cold. If you find you are unsure, tell him you can't gauge his eye movement properly and can he help by telling you which column the word is – left or right and then if the word is on top or below.

In this way it is about you learning and not him mastering the chart.

Take frequent breaks, laugh a lot, have him give you tests of your capacity and in every way possible, let him experience success. It is hard for a patient to learn a new system and a little scary to realize what he can and can't do, so anything to reduce the stress is great!

**Go slow** - After a couple of days, once he is able to use the chart, describe the other charts to him and let him choose what he wants to add. Change the topics and words within the topics to things that you think matter to him – many will add the names or photographs of people for example or specific activities that they enjoy or programs they may like to listen to or watch.

By now, you will also realize his abilities and limitations, so you may want to modify the charts with more or less words, bigger or smaller letter size, greater space or different organization – the sample charts are just some examples to give ideas – please modify EVERYTHING!

**Expand** – As the number of charts grows, you may want to stick them on the walls or doors so that he can show you by turning his head what he wants to talk about. Here is where colour comes in handy. If there is a big bright green blob, he can easily locate it and look in that direction and you know to bring the I NEED chart to him.

There is one example chart that simply has the names of each chart on it – you can also simply place this in front of him or tear it in half and stick each half on an arm of his chair and he can always look at, point or in other ways indicate that he has something to say.

**The body chart** - you must have seen the body chart and wondered what it was all about. Simply, it is a way for him to tell you if he wants something done. First, he has to look at the word – does he want something cleaned or wiped, itched, massaged, covered or uncovered, moved or repositioned or does something hurt?? If he cannot move his eyes that easily, point and name each one in turn and have him say yes or no.

Now, once you know what the need is, the question is where. Point to each picture in turn – is it your face, your body, your back? Let's say he chose "body" then ask (covering the picture so that only what you are talking about is exposed) top half (cover the bottom half as you ask this) yes or no? The next question is left side or right side? And so on until you can identify the part he needs help with.

You may also want to change or modify some of the words for example – dry (lips, hands, eyes) may be more bothersome than cover or uncover.

**Remember!** We suggest systems, but you know this person so well, that you will probably guess need and intention without following any system! But do stop and ask and encourage him to tell you things, even things you know as it keeps his mind active and gives him that feeling of at least a little control over his life!