

COMMUNICATING CHOICES

WHAT IS COMMUNICATING CHOICES?

Communicating choices refers to someone communicating their preference between 2 or more objects (or activities) to a communication partner. It requires the individual to make a choice and then to communicate that decision to a communication partner i.e., it's more than just making a choice on their own.

WHY IS COMMUNICATING CHOICES IMPORTANT?

Being able to communicate choices shows an individual the power and control that communication can give. It allows an individual to experience a relationship between his actions & the environmental outcomes. It is one of the earliest forms of active, meaningful communication.

Helping an "individual experience more control in his or her life... is an effective strategy for preventing and overcoming learned helplessness". Providing choice has been shown to have "an impact on an individual's social and emotional development... as well as some skill acquisition, increased independence and... reduction of some challenging behaviours."

WHEN CAN YOU USE COMMUNICATING CHOICES?

"For the exercise of choice to be meaningful...opportunities must be available across the day, within daily activities and routines. Every available opportunity to express preference, choice, and dominance needs to be identified and capitalized on". Aim for hundreds of opportunities daily. Most situations throughout the day have the potential to be offered as a choice - all you need is to change your thinking and always remember to offer choices.

Categories of choice that are available within most daily routines include:

- **Between Activities** (opportunity to choose among different activities)
- **Within Activities** (choice of materials within an activity)
- **Refusal** (choice to refuse participation in an activity)
- **Who** (choice of person(s) to include/exclude in an activity)
- **Where** (choice of location of an activity)
- **When** (at what time the activity should occur), and
- **Terminate** (choice to end a particular activity).

Communication partners must be prepared to follow through on whatever selection the individual makes. If the choice is not a possibility, do not offer it.

HOW CAN YOU PROMOTE AN INDIVIDUAL TO COMMUNICATE CHOICES?

Begin with routines that are familiar to the individual. Use actual objects needed (or photos, pictures, gestures or objects as representations). Use anything that is easy and the individual understands.

Hold up one of the choices and briefly show what it does. Move it to the side, preferably still holding it. Hold up the other choice and briefly show what it does. Move it to the other side. Both choices are now in easy view for the individual. Consider the position of the individual at rest and when making choices as well as the position of the partner and the materials. Modify these as needed to make the exchange easy and clear.

Now ask the individual (using simple language) to communicate his choice to you. Accept the individual's communication as long as it is clear that he or she is attempting to make a choice. This could be an extended eye gaze, a swipe, a grab, a point – anything that is clear to the