

Sybil Elgar School | Our Transdisciplinary Team Newsletter

USING SYMBOLS TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Developing Understanding of Symbols

Link the symbol (picture with written word) with the item/activity it represents to support and teach understanding in the environment.

- Attach a symbol to the object or place which it represents (biscuit, toilet) and draw attention to the symbol.
- When young person associates the symbol with the real thing place the symbol a short distance away and show. This makes symbols into a portable system.
- It is important to use symbols for things which are meaningful to your child and wait for clear signs of understanding before introducing new symbols.

Expressing Needs and Making Choices

Provide information about available options – this helps support self- expression.

- Keeping symbols within reach allows you to encourage the young person to get or point to the symbol to indicate needs (for example book, dinner).
- Symbols may be attached to a key ring or placed in a small photo album, file or notebook or in a PECS File (Picture Exchange Communication System).
- To learn to make a choice (for example for food / leisure activities) it may be helpful to exchange the symbol for the desired object (PECS) or point to the picture (picture pointing system) Show two symbols and prompt young person to select a symbol and give it to you or point to receive the item. The young person can then see the benefits of communicating.
- Create a need to communicate by holding the item, putting objects out of reach/sight.
- Make a choice board with favourite items.



Sequences/Timetables/Schedules

Symbols can be used to help understanding of what's going to happen. A timetable provides a visual structure and can be used to help develop independence.

- Initially pictures with real objects can be used to show what is going to happen next (coat for going out).
- Photos, symbols, written words can be used for schedules.
- A timetable can be built up. Symbols should be left to right or top to bottom. You can use the child's photo. Children can be encouraged to take the visual cue to the event. The removal of items shows that the event has finished. Gradually develop independence: learning to check the timetable. Try a portable timetable, on a clipboard and tick events off as they happen.
- Sequences of symbols can be used to help the child through daily routines: Examples- washing /dressing / cleaning teeth / getting ready to go out
- Symbol sequences can also be used to help develop independence in self-help skills: Examples- washing-up, making a drink, cooking.

