

## **LET THE SWITCH DO THE TALKING: STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY AND DAY-PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

### **TYPES OF TALKING SWITCHES**

"Talking Switches" are voice output devices, which are often used as a starting place to augment a nonverbal person's means of communication. There are two basic types of talking switches: one that allows communicating only one thought or message (e.g., the BIGmack from AbleNet; Talking Buddy by tash) and one that allows sending a sequence of messages (e.g., the Step-by-Step Communicator from AbleNet; Sequencer from Adaptivation).

### **BENEFITS OF VOICE OUTPUT**

- allows a way of initiating communication
- provides a means of communication that can be easily understood by both familiar and unfamiliar listeners (even pets!)
- gives a means to call out, interrupt, and be assertive in a way that is difficult for other people to ignore. A "voice" gets people's attention or things that are enjoyed. It's also more socially acceptable than yelling!
- activating a switch has an impact on the environment, leading to more active participation. Cause and effect is learned and practiced in a functional way.
- communication can occur at a distance and to more than one person at a time.
- once the individual has the attention of others using the Talking Switch, s/he can then continue the interaction by using other methods of communication, such as gestures or facial expressions.
- provides opportunities for turn-taking (I say something, you say something)
- puts language in a meaningful framework, increasing the likelihood that the individual may begin to understand the meanings or specific words or phrases.
- allows the individual to communicate in a way that is closer to what s/he is already hearing from others.

### **TYPES OF MESSAGES**

There are many opportunities for participation and interaction throughout the day. Try to find messages that are the most motivating. For example, we often tend to think of messages that focus on needs and wants, but these aren't necessarily the most motivating for the individual. Also, if the individual shows that s/he is tiring of a message, change it to one that is more motivating. Think of different situations where different messages can be used: home, day programs, and community at large. Think of using messages that the individual doesn't have another effective way of communicating, and that will have an impact on others. We also change the messages frequently to pull others in to an interaction or conversation. Keep the messages as clear and simple as possible.

Pictures or symbols that match the message can be placed directly on the switch for extra visual cueing. This will develop the individual's symbol recognition through an activity-based approach.

The following are samples of messages. Some opportunities will be planned, such as giving directions. Others will be more spontaneous, such as answering a question.

Communicative Intent/Activity	Message
get attention, initiate a conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Come over here!</li> <li>• Hey, dude!</li> <li>• Hi, Mom. Guess who I saw at McDonalds today.</li> <li>• Hey, I was looking at that. Bring it back please!</li> </ul>
terminating an activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm finished now.</li> </ul>
social etiquette; greetings getting on the bus; speaking with the bus driver entering day program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank-you (after receiving an object, or receiving help).</li> <li>• Good morning.</li> <li>• Hi Mr. Smith. How are you doing?</li> <li>• Nice to meet you.</li> </ul>
deliver a message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mrs. Jones needs some envelopes. Do you have any that she can borrow?</li> </ul>
conversations with peers at the day program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hey! What's new?</li> <li>• What did you think of the game last night?</li> <li>• What are you doing this weekend?</li> <li>• I like going to the movies. What kinds of movies do you like?*</li> </ul>
tell staff/peers that coffee is ready	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your coffee is ready! Come and get it.</li> </ul>
games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roll the dice!</li> <li>• Move me, please</li> <li>• Who's turn is it next?</li> <li>• What's the score?</li> <li>• Rules/directions for the game*</li> </ul>
direct the action of another person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'd like to get out of my wheelchair, please.</li> </ul>
giving directions about a location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome to Community Living Service.</li> <li>• The meeting is in the multi-purpose room, down the hall, to your right.</li> </ul>
initiate when finished	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I've had enough.</li> <li>• I'm done.</li> <li>• That's all for me.</li> </ul>
discuss weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I love this sunshine. What about you?</li> </ul>
getting opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think about the price of gas?</li> </ul>
taking a lunch order for a staff member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'd like pastrami on rye, please.</li> </ul>
message for a fund raiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buy a donut for 50 cents. Help support our trip to Vancouver.</li> </ul>
ordering at a fast food restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'd like a cheeseburger, fries, and chocolate shake please.</li> </ul>
field trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I liked the Imax show the best today. What did you like?</li> </ul>
shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much does it cost?</li> </ul>

directing self care activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I need... (coat, hat, etc.)*</li> </ul>
foods/cooking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, turn on the oven to 350 degrees</li> <li>• Second, grease a muffin pan</li> <li>• Third, measure 2 cups flour and place in a large bowl, etc.*</li> </ul>
grocery shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of grocery items*</li> </ul>
cheering for a team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go, Sharks, go! Whoo-hoo!</li> </ul>
telling a joke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you heard about the guy who...? He .....</li> </ul>
directions for completing a vocational task.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Here are the steps ...</li> </ul>
directing the behaviour of animals at doggy day care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rex, come here.</li> </ul>
snack/mealtimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm thirsty. I'd love a drink of juice.</li> <li>• Could I have another drink?</li> </ul>
bedtime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gee. I'm tired. I think I'd like to go to bed now please.</li> </ul>
toileting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'd like to go to the washroom.</li> </ul>
collecting/researching books for a particular topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any books on the subject of global warming?</li> </ul>
factual information about self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hi, my name is ....</li> <li>• I love Rottweilers, going on walks, listening to Hilary Duff, and cruising the malls.</li> <li>• I talk with this switch and I can make some choices by looking at the thing I want when it's in front of me.</li> <li>• If you say "hi" to me, I look at you to say "hi" back.</li> <li>• Don't be a stranger!</li> </ul>
complaining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I done yet?</li> <li>• She's bugging me!</li> </ul>
buying a movie ticket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One adult for Batman please.</li> </ul>
renting a video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long can I keep the video?</li> </ul>
shopping for clothes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm looking for a red sweater in Medium.</li> </ul>
requesting something, such as a particular piece of music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can we listen to the "Dave Matthews" CD today?</li> </ul>
compliment others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like your new hairstyle.</li> </ul>
planting flowers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let's put tulips here.</li> </ul>
asking questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can I sit by Lisa today?</li> </ul>
packing a lunch or a picnic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember the watermelon.</li> </ul>
indicate a desire for 'more' of something	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May I have another one, please?</li> </ul>

\* Works best with a sequence voice output device (e.g., Step-by-Step Communicator)

Keep track of all the messages that you program. Keep using messages that the individual enjoys and ones that get a positive response from others.

**The key to success with voice output using single switch access is to keep it interesting, fun, highly motivating, novel and to use it often in a variety of situations and activities. Remember that the best way to learn anything is through lots and lots of practice.**