

**Yes/No and Picture Communication Training
for Family and Staff**
Visions, LLC

Objective and Rationale:

Objective: To teach a person who does not talk to say “yes” or “no” when asked a yes/no question, or to select a picture of a preferred item/activity when given a choice of items/activities.

Rationale: Improving a person’s ability to communicate needs and wants will

- Decrease problematic behavior
- Prevent disruption to others
- Decrease the need for reactive intervention
- Improve Person’s quality of life

Yes/No Communication:

1. Materials: Create yes and no cards using poster board, index cards, or paper and a laminator. They should be different colors and have the words typed on them. For example, use green for yes and red for no.

--If Person is able to remove cards that are Velcro’ed to a surface, then attach the cards to a clipboard, binder, or other flat surface with Velcro, such that the card can be easily removed by the person. This will make it easier to travel with the cards.

--Alternatively, you can use a key chain ring to hold smaller versions of yes, no, and other communication cards, for easy transport.

--You can also put yes/no cards on a table, wall, or cabinet, but you should be ready to transport the cards to wherever Person goes so they can say yes or no when they need to, regardless of where they are.

--Make sure that you have a system that is easy for Person to use, given their abilities and other circumstances. If it is too hard to physically do the response, the person will not learn to choose yes or no.

--**NOTE:** These instructions can be applied to any system the person has in place, such as an electronic communication device, iPad communication app, spoken words or sign language, etc. Just modify the procedures when necessary, depending on how the person will be saying “yes” and “no.”

2. Place laminated yes and no cards in front of Person, and show them which is yes and which is no (or point out yes and no on communication device/app).

--If Person is sitting at a table, position the cards in front of Person on the table.

--If Person is not sitting at a table, you can hold the cards or clipboard/binder up in front of Person.

--**Be sure to switch the location of the cards across trials, so Person is responding to the word and color of the card and not to the position of the card.** (This does not apply for communication devices or apps.)

NOTE: Person will choose by picking up the card and handing it to you, or you can just have the person point to the card if picking up and handing it to you is too hard. (If you are using a device, the choice will be made by pressing the button with the appropriate word or picture on it.)

3. Before asking Person a question, make sure they are listening and that there are not too many distractions that might interfere with learning.

4. Ask Person questions that you know the answer to (and that Person knows the answer to). At first, ask Person if they want a preferred item, to increase motivation for the task. Show them the item that you’re asking them if they want. If Person hands you/points to the yes card, tell them they chose yes and give them the item. If Person hands you the no card, tell them they chose no and put the item out of sight. If you think Person actually wants the item, wait a bit and ask them again. Do not give them the item if they choose the

“no” card. DO give them the item if they choose the yes card, even if you know Person doesn’t want it.
Person will not learn the meaning of the cards if you do not provide them the correct consequence.

****NOTE: Make sure that you ask “no” questions (not just “yes” questions), so that Person learns to say no when they do not want that item/activity.**

5. Once you think Person understands the yes/no cards with regard to things they want/need, you can begin asking them questions about how they feel, such as if they feel sick or in pain. It would be very beneficial for Person to be able to say, for example, that their head hurts or they want some pain medicine.

--For this, you really need to know how Person is feeling, in order to teach them to be accurate, which is hard, since you don’t really know how they feel.

--So, if you can tell that Person is not sick, then ask if they feel sick and praise them when they answer no. If they answer yes, tell them they don’t seem sick and ask again. Reward the correct answer.

--If Person has a fever, vomited, or is otherwise acting like they do when they are sick, this would be a good time to ask if they feel sick or their stomach doesn’t feel good, etc. and reward answers of “yes.”

6. OPTIONAL--FOR SKILLS/ACADEMICS: When you believe Person knows the difference between the yes and no cards and is responding correctly when asked if they want an item, add other, factual questions (such as “Is this a lion?” while pointing to a picture of a lion [yes] or elephant [no]).

--If you are not sure if Person knows the answer, help them out by positioning the correct card closer to Person so that the incorrect card is more difficult to select. Prompt as needed; for example, point to the correct card while saying the correct answer and physically guide Person’s hand if necessary.

--As Person improves, you can stop pointing and physically guiding, and they may begin to answer the question on their own.

--**Provide behavior-specific praise for correct answers.** For incorrect answers when Person seems to have tried, praise Person’s trying with lower-intensity praise. For incorrect answers when Person didn’t try or got it wrong on purpose, ignore and re-present the question or present a different question. And if Person is not complying with the task, you might want to stop asking them and try again later (see #8 below).

7. Provide preferred items, treats, activities, praise, or breaks to reinforce attempts as needed.

8. Person will not always comply with this task. If Person is indicating they do not want to do the task, either verbally or with their behavior (such as pushing the cards away or selecting the wrong answer on purpose), they are not likely to comply, and you should try again later. They may also get tired of the task after answering some of your questions correctly. When Person indicates they no longer want to do the task, using words or behavior or by not replying, ask them if they want a break using the yes/no cards. If Person chooses yes, thank them for letting you know and tell them you’re going to give them a break. Then give them the break. If Person has participated for a while, you can also offer a preferred activity. If Person refuses to answer your question about whether they want a break, promise them that all they have to do is say yes, and you will leave them alone. **Try to follow through!!!**

9. End the practice session on a positive note—a correct answer with a treat or praise BEFORE Person gets sick of doing the task.

10. Practice in real-life situations so that you can ask yes/no questions any time!

Picture Communication:

Materials: Create picture cards using poster board, index cards, or paper and a laminator. You can use pictures from BoardMaker or from the internet, or take pictures of items in your house, print them, and laminate them or tape them to an index card. Include pictures of food, drink, bathroom, activities, people, etc. – anything/anyone the person you are teaching might ask for. Start with only 1 or 2 pictures at a time.

1. Teach the meaning of each card.

If you can tell Person wants to do something (for example, listen to music or take a walk), show Person the picture card while telling them what the card means (“we’re going to listen to music” or “we’re going for a walk inside”) while showing them the card. You can also show them the card while saying something like “this card means walk inside” so that they pay attention to the picture. ***Do this every time you do an activity that you want Person to be able to request.***

2. Get Person to point to the card of the activity you’re going to do.

After several trials with #1 above, it is now time to teach Person to point to the card.

Start with an activity that you know Person wants to do now, such as use the bathroom or take a walk.

Show them the appropriate card as described in #1 above, and prompt Person to touch the card. Help Person touch the card by moving the card closer to Person’s hand, and/or use physical guidance if needed. Praise Person when they touch the card, then tell them they’re going to do the activity shown in the picture. Then do the activity. When Person gets better at this, you should fade the physical guidance and ask them to touch the card if they want to do the activity.

--If Person engages in problem behavior, ask them if they want to do the activity, and show them the yes/no cards and have them point to yes or no. Follow through on Person’s request (see yes/no card instructions).

--If problem behavior continues or escalates, ask Person if they want a break, using the yes/no cards (or “break” card if you’ve taught that meaning) and follow through on that request.

--At some point you should have a “break” or “stop” card and teach Person to ask for a break or to stop by pointing to or handing you that card.

3. Get Person to choose between activities.

After Person is reliably pointing to the card of the activity they want to do, you can start to give them choices by showing them two cards and asking them “which one do you want?” Be sure to remind them what the cards mean if necessary. If Person starts to engage in problem behavior, ask them if they want a break using the yes/no cards. It could also be that they do not want either of the options you offered, so switch the options if other activities are available.

As with yes/no training, be sure to make the training and choices a pleasant experience by offering preferred items, activities, praise, and breaks throughout, and by stopping your requests BEFORE Person gets tired or frustrated. Be sure to end the practice session on a positive note.

NOTE: At some point, Person may be able to independently request items without prompting. You may be able to put several pictures of available items and activities out for them to choose from, and they might show you the picture of the item/activity they want without you explicitly prompting them. *Be sure to only have pictures of items or activities that are available at that time.* For example, if there is no one available to take Person for a walk inside, do not offer that picture card as an option.

ANOTHER NOTE: Add pictures of preferred items as needed, but make sure you do this slowly so Person doesn’t get confused on which cards mean what. When you introduce a new card, go back to #1 above as needed to teach them what the new card means.

