**Using Visuals
to
Support Communication**

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC)

▶ The term AAC encompasses many different strategies to support children who are non-verbal or have low expressive language skills to communicate with others.

▶ Alternative Communication generally refers to communication strategies that **replace** verbal communication (non-verbal).

▶ Augmentative Communication refers to communication methods used to **support** verbal communication. This is generally used as a combination of an attempt at speech and at the same time using signing, gesturing or pointing to a visual.

▶ AAC can include using Braille, signing, key word signs, gestures, visuals, communication boards, communication books, voice output devices and combinations of these.

▶ This presentation will focus on using **visuals** to support communication in the kindergarten including choice-making boards, commenting/requesting boards, communication book and voice output devices.

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Working together – the team supports the child

- Children who have significant communication support needs will often have professionals such as a speech pathologist or key worker who work with the family to provide support for the child in their communication skills and development.

- As a teacher it is important to speak with the family in regard to the speech pathologist visiting the kinder to provide information and support around using visuals to support communication in that environment.

- Generally it is the speech pathologist who will develop, add to and otherwise change the child's visual communication supports and teachers can provide valuable insight into how the child's communication can be extended.

- Establishing an SSG (Student Support Group) which meets once a term and involves all members of the child's support team (teachers, parents, therapists, others) may be a useful support. An SSG meeting enables sharing of concerns, goals, strategies and understandings about the child and facilitates the team working together to support the child.

Indicating choices – ways to access

▶ Children **may directly access** by pointing to what they want to communicate.

▶ Children with a physical disability may need adult support to directly access or may use other means such as eye pointing or auditory scanning.

▶ Auditory scanning involves an adult reading out options or their device scanning through options and the child responds when the option they want is reached.

▶ AAC technology has and is developing rapidly. There are many ways for individuals to access a speech output device.

▶ If a child is using or learning to use a communication book or speech output device, then the involvement of their speech therapist at kindergarten is highly recommended.

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Choice-making boards

Choice-making boards can be used to assist children to choose an experience.

They can also be activity specific to assist in communicating choices during the activity.
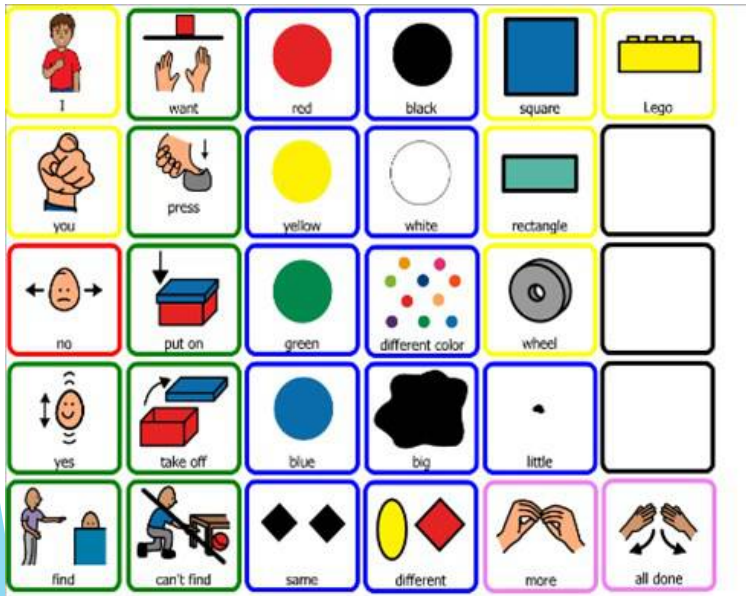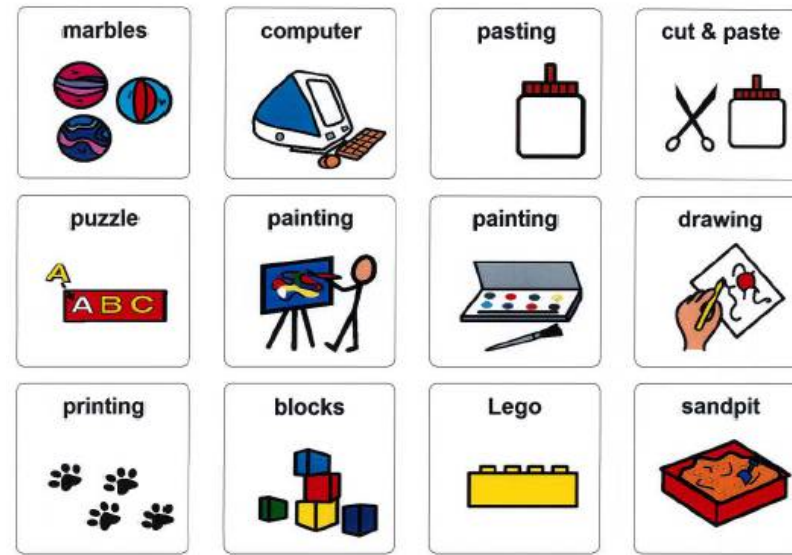
General commenting/requesting board

These boards can be used to request, comment, express feelings, ask a question, take turns with others, and express ideas to others.

They can be generic or individualised.

They can be simple (food, drink, like this, don't like this, tired), have a targeted skill development focus (such as requesting or turn-taking), or more complex, depending on the needs of the individual child.
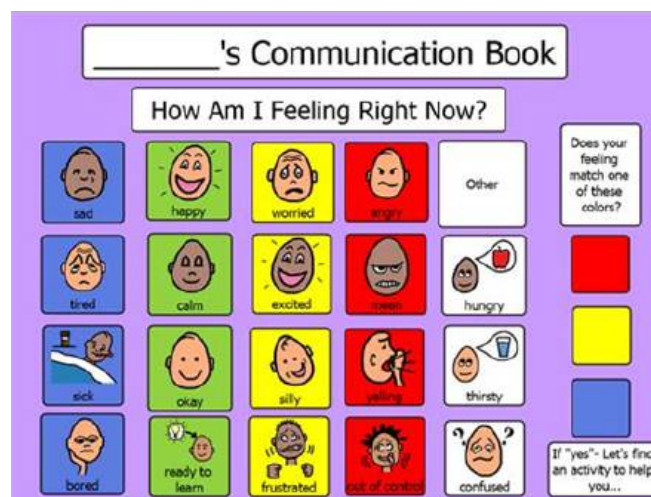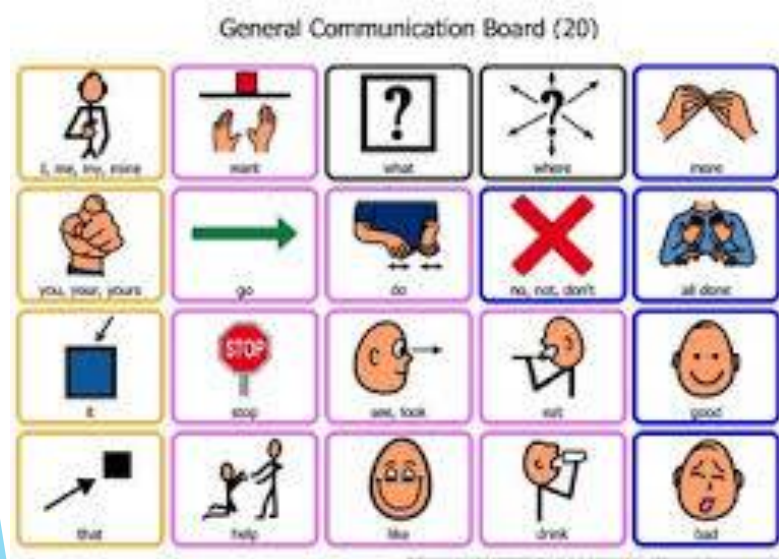
Multi-level communication book

▶ A multi-level communication book is basically a compilation of communication boards.

▶ It generally has a front page which is a bit like a table of contents in a book. It will have the different functions (chapters) of the communication book and the child can indicate which part of the book they would like to access.

▶ There will generally be tabs on the communication book to assist in accessing these quickly and easily.

▶ The child may be able to do this independently or they may need assistance to find the page they are looking for.

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Voice output devices

▶ These can vary greatly in function and complexity.

▶ A button or other recording device can record a single message so that the child can indicate a choice.

▶ A single level communication board can record multiple choices/messages.

▶ Other devices are multi-level touch screens and work in the same way as a multi-level communication book. They can be simple to begin with and expanded as the communication needs of the child develop.

▶ Again support from the child's Speech Pathologist is important when using a multi-level device.

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Availability

▶ Child must be able to easily and quickly access their communication book or device (or other method) in the kinder environment when they need it. This may involve having a bag on wheelchair or k-walker or educator having a shoulder bag if they are working with the child, in which to carry book or device with them.

▶ Communication boards can be placed strategically around the room. Drawing communication board on drawing table, etc.

▶ Children and/or adults may have key words on a smaller laminated card, key ring or lanyard which can be worn around neck or put in pocket.

Autism: Portable Visual Communication Cards

Picture Exchange

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Modelling use of board, book or device

Always ask the child first if it is OK to use their book or device

- It is important to model for the child how to use their board, book or device across all environments. As you point to a symbol, say the word with the child. This may be a new word for the child.

- A child may need you to model lots of times before they are ready to use a device. Do not give up. Remember a baby is exposed to thousands of words before they start to talk.

- Teachers may find multi-level communication books and voice output devices to be intimidating, particularly if you haven't used one before. That is OK. Remember you are all learning together.

- You may need to spend some time familiarising yourself with where things are located. Start with something simple such as asking for a turn or choosing what to do next and increase from there.

- It is important to model for the child trying to find a word, making mistakes, looking in different places, asking others for help and **persevering** until you find the word you are looking for.

- Model use across routines and experiences of the kindergarten day.

- Teach other children how to use book or device to communicate with the child (with the child's permission).

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Resources

- https://www.scopeaust.org.au

- https://www.spectronics.com.au

- https://aaccommunity.net/2017/02/use-aided-language-modeling/

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