

Unlocking Communication in the Severely Impaired Child

Presenters:

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...for Living, Learning, Working, and Playing.

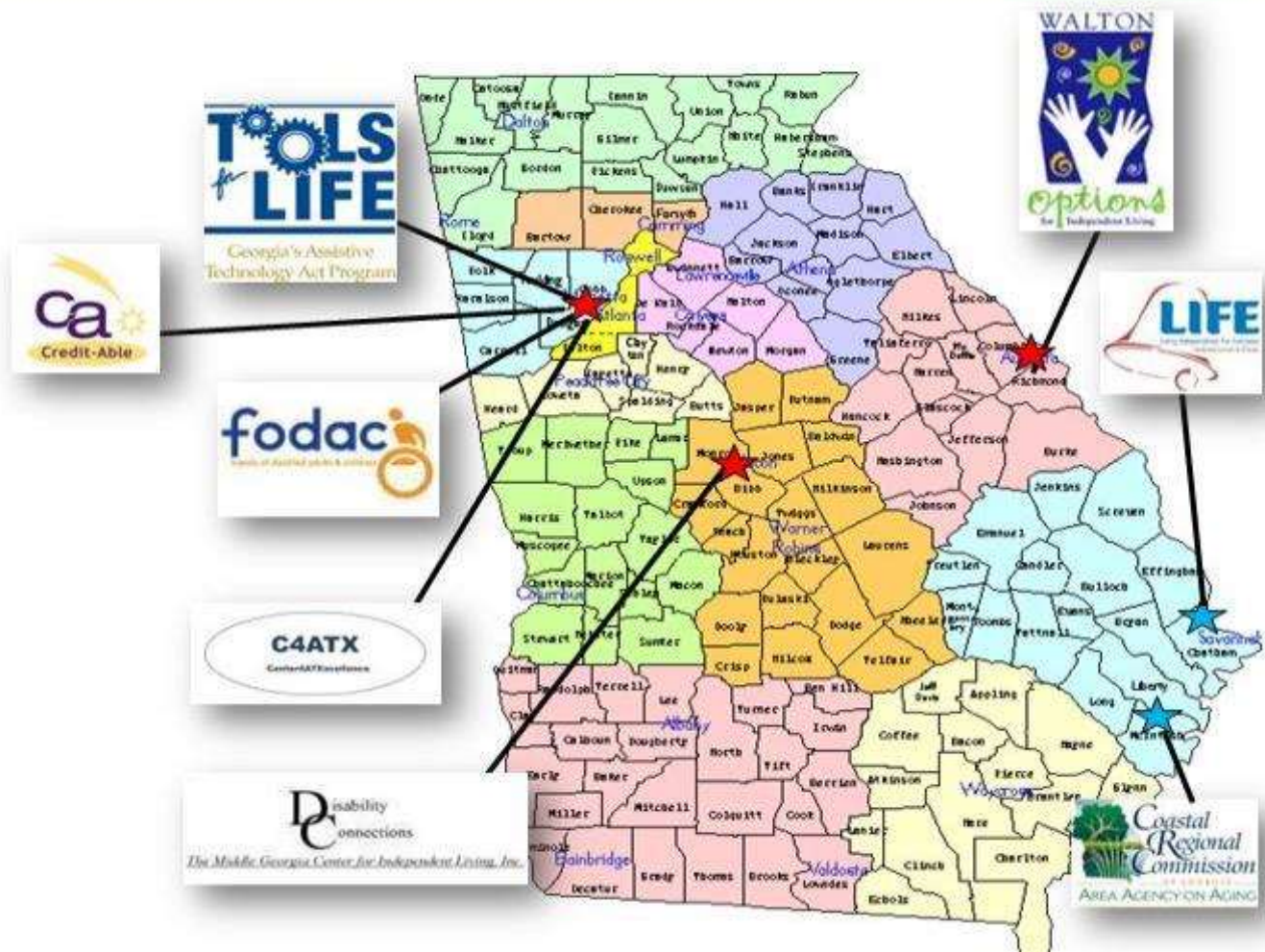
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Unlocking Communication in the Severely Impaired Child

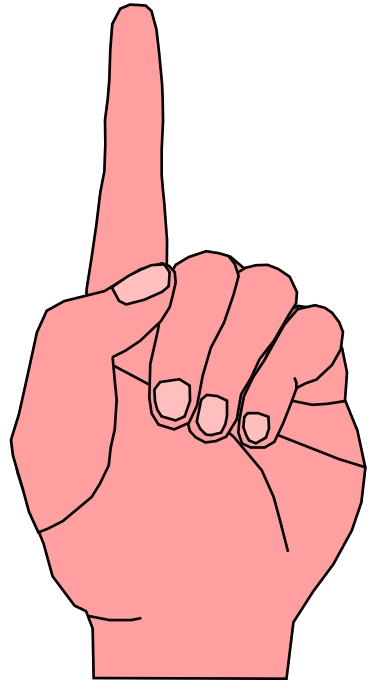
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**“NO ONE EVER
ROSE TO LOWER
EXPECTATIONS!!”**

-Rosner 1990



-
- “It is much easier **not to deal with someone as an individual** once he has been reduced to a cliché.”
 - **Ethics & Other Liabilities by Harry Stein**



Rules

Rule #1: To be “unlocked” they must have something to say and at least one movement that they can control or learn to control.



**People communicate things to us all day long.
We just need to be smart enough to pay attention
to what they are saying nonverbally.**



Ways to say “no” or “I’m unhappy”

**Turn away
throw things
throw their body back
stick out their tongue
cry
frown
gag/throw up
vocalize**

ways to say yes or I’m happy

**smile
look
reach
rock or bounce
excitement
look up
clap
vocalize**

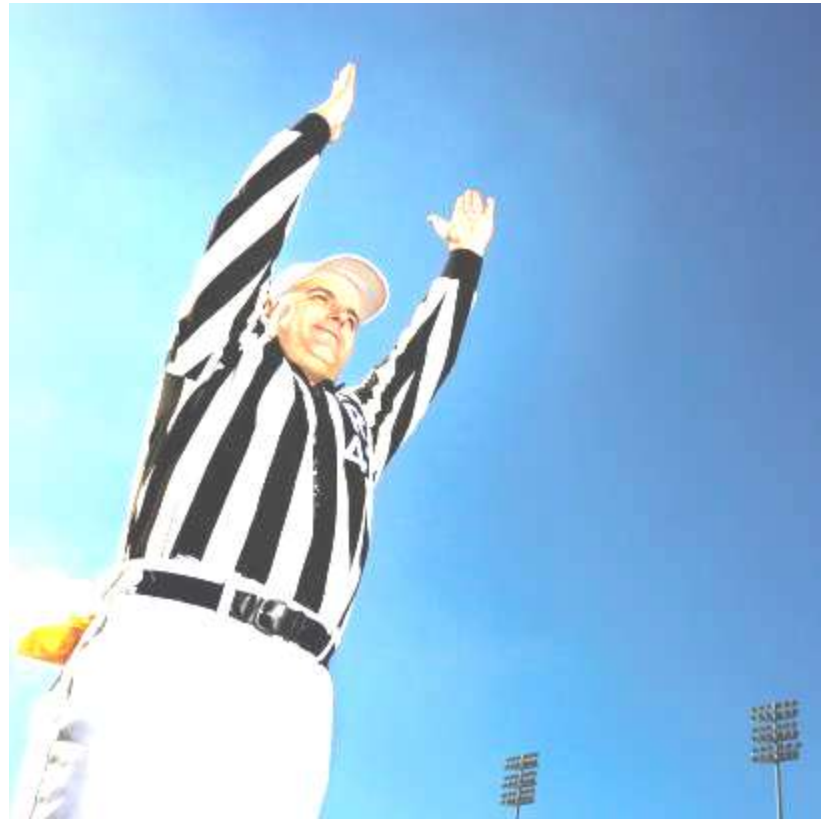


Rule #2: The motivation must exceed the effort!

- What is motivating to one person may not be what the person in charge of them wants them to say.
- Look at what they are already trying to say with their body language.
- Always analyze the physical demands.
- Make sure they are working on only one new task at a time, especially in the beginning.

Rule #3: The people who make the most gains are those who receive a consistent presentation of communication strategies across all environments.

- Cueing
- Pictures
- Expectations
- Collaboration is key



The child with Multiple sensory Impairments

Please read
my mind



Motor and visual impairments
Or
Vision and hearing
Or
Motor and vision and hearing
impairment



Things to keep in mind

- ▶ **Make sure equipment is working if they have it such as glasses or hearing aids.**
- ▶ **Children with multiple sensory impairments often do not perform at 80% mastery level. Need to be aware of when they don't know something or if they are just not interested. Many times we are talking about a highly distractible child.**
 - They may be bored
 - They may be listening to what is going on around them
 - They may have done it once and you missed it so they might not do it again
 - They are excellent at “playing possum”
- ▶ **They need to buy into what you are selling.**
 - If they are engaged or have a say in what they are doing they might be more inclined to participate.
- ▶ **Their responses are often subtle**
 - This is why you need to know their body language first and foremost
- ▶ **Redirect body language to show them how to say things.**
 - Let them know you heard them
 - Then show them know how to say it correctly
- ▶ **Looking for a buildable skill that is appropriate.**
 - Communication hierarchy speaking, verbalizing, gestures, and then augmentative communication.

Formula for Success

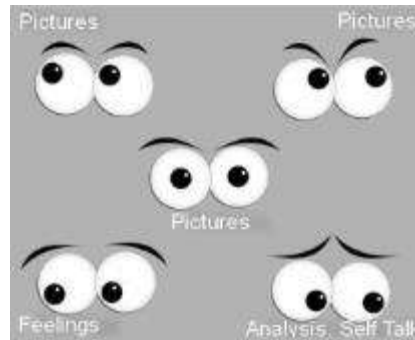
Find out what they are
trying to say and then give
them an easy way to say it!!

Direct access versus indirect access

Look for the easiest volitional movement under their control.

Eyes

Look up
Blink



Head

Turn
Tilt
Lift



Hands/arms

Touch
Come near
reach



For people with motor and visual impairments

“Partner assisted scanning”

- ▶ Listening to choices and activating a switch or giving some formal response to affirm once they hear what they want to say
- ▶ Give predictable choices.
- ▶ Let them know in advance what messages are before expecting them to make a formal choice.
- ▶ Limit distracters.
- ▶ Present at least one highly motivating choice
- ▶ Record single shot message “yes” or “yes that is what I want” and then let them know what will happen when they select the switch or press the message.
- ▶ Wait at least 3-5 seconds at least between choices, may need more if person has a long response time.
- ▶ Sometimes the choice is “none of these”
- ▶ May need physical prompt to hold hand over the switch or assist in accessing to begin with. Fade this quickly.
- ▶ Give several passes.
- ▶ Watch body language and redirect if necessary.
- ▶ Typically they will communicate initially within a motivating activity.
- ▶ Whenever possible try to confirm choice by behavioral response to limit miscommunication.



People with vision *and* hearing difficulties

- ▶ This group of people have enough vision to stimulate visually.
- ▶ There are many settings on device to accommodate low vision for nonverbal individuals. You need to know the settings and their needs in order to decide if they are a candidate. For the most part we are talking about individuals who have no form of formal communication and are impaired in both of these areas.
- ▶ Try everything first.
- ▶ Use multimodality approach to communication.
- ▶ Make sure if you introduce symbols they are large enough to be seen.
- ▶ May need to start with real pictures and high visual contrast.
- ▶ A word about *cortical visual impairments*.
- ▶ What does “all done” really mean to this population
- ▶ Look at placement
- ▶ Make sure you are getting a reliable response
- ▶ Validate with real choices
- ▶ Teach them how to tell you things
- ▶ Hand over hand for teaching is acceptable.
- ▶ You want more right responses than wrong. Find out first what they want and then show them a way to say it.
- ▶ Help them, verbal praise and reinforcement are important



Caleb 6 years old Preemie



Will 5 years old Charge Syndrome



The cognitively “Low” Child



The Cognitively Low Child

These are the children who just don't seem to get it
You don't know how much they understand

- ▶ Concrete is best
- ▶ May need to show them how to say it at first
- ▶ Use visual cueing when needed.
 - Levels of light cueing
 - Specific (hold the light on the designated target)
 - General (shine the light in the area the target word is located)
 - Attending (shine the light towards the eyes to attract vision and then on device)
 - Momentary (shine briefly on choices or area)
- ▶ Need highly motivating communication environments
- ▶ Multisensory environments are often very motivating
- ▶ Many of these people get stuck in cause effect mode
- ▶ They are often routine oriented individuals and therefore, communication strategies should be incorporated in their routines
- ▶ 30 second rule
- ▶ Consistency is critical
- ▶ Watch body language to look for validation



How to move from objects to pictures

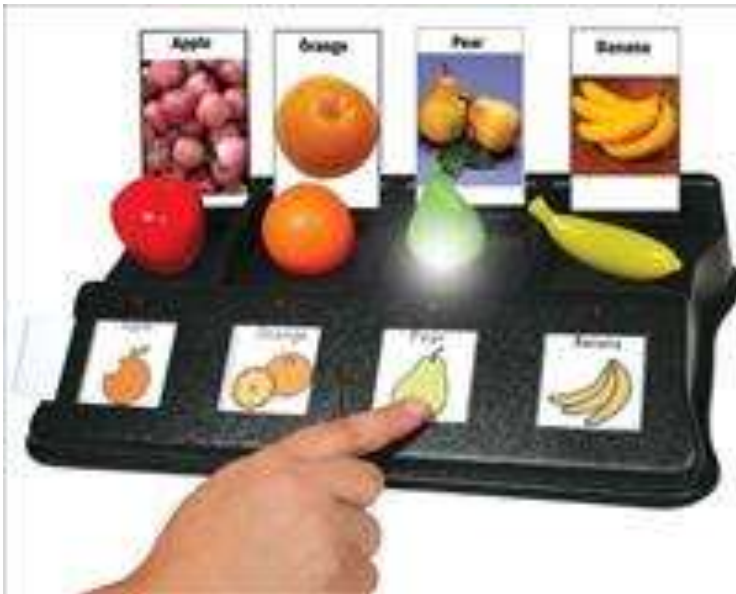
“The Plan”

1. Choice making between objects

- Children should have opportunities all day long to make choices
- Watch for patterns in reaching such as always choosing the one on the left.
- Make sure they see both items before selecting



2. Pair exact picture of object with object itself when presenting the object for choice making.



3. Keep picture near object. Placement should be consistent.



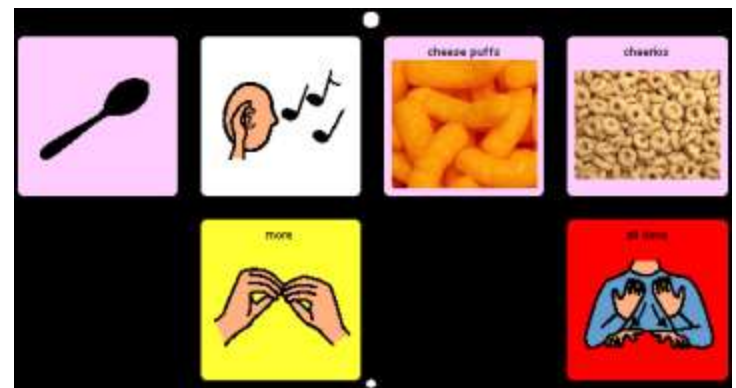
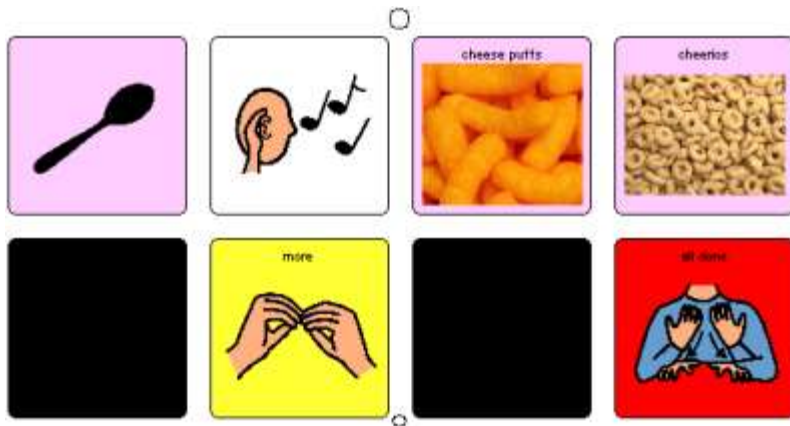
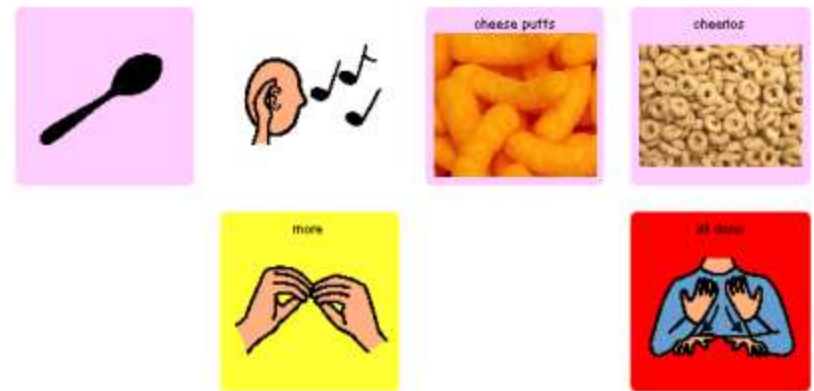
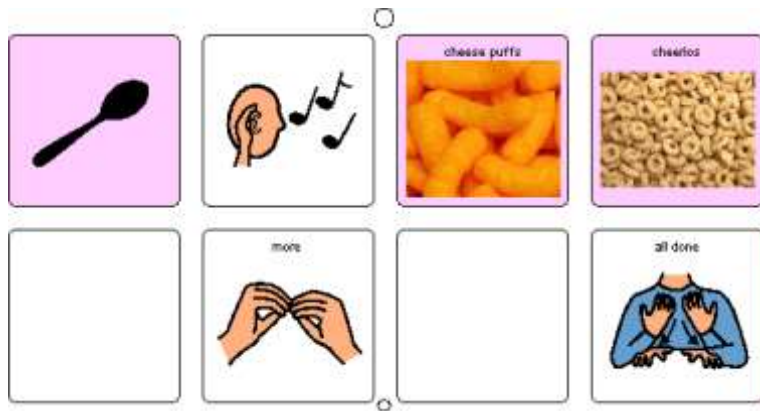
4. Show object with picture and then put object down on the same side show picture. If child is unable to choose between pictures then present objects again and encourage choice. Then show pictures again and show how to choose correct one. Try again until child is able to choose picture of desired object.



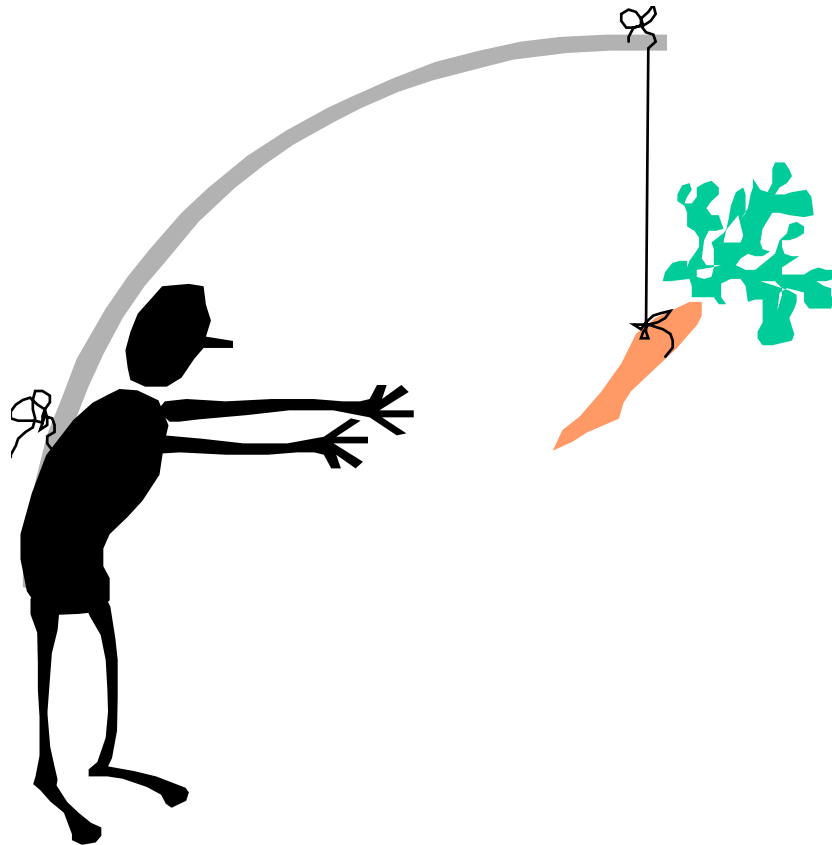
5. Always model next level once they are at the picture stage.



6. Use color coding and contrasting backgrounds as needed to aid the child in message selection.



A word about food as a reinforcer



Outside of therapy

- Set up the environment
- Model use of symbols for receptive as well as expressive
- Set up the idea of moving from general to specific
- Keep overlays in visual view
- Keep single shot voice output systems at the persons level for easy activation but not so near that they frequently can accidentally activate it.

Emily 10 year old girl with seizures



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The Child with severe physical limitations



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Types of tone

- High tone- increased stiffness of movement



- Low tone- weak or floppy movement

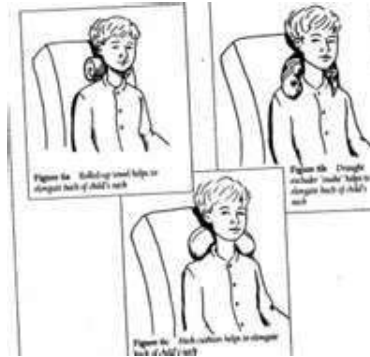


- Fluctuating tone- a combination of stiff and floppy in the same muscle group



Low Tech Assistance

- Towel rolls



- Slant boards



- T bars



- Adapted pointers



- Weights



- Squeeze lights



Key points

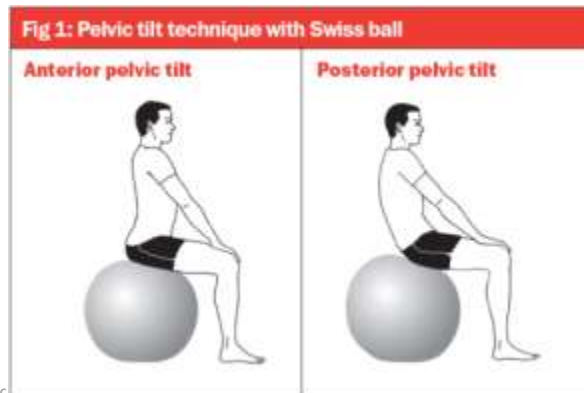
- Eye hand versus head neck
 - Hand is more concrete but head might be easier
 - Use of head keeps eyes up where as use of hands encourages the head to drop as child recruits movement
 - Frequently use of a tray helps children use head neck muscles better
 - Some children can get on the switch but not off of it
 - Remember looking for volitional movement that a child can recreate.

Posture is important for movement

Do not feed the asymmetric tonic neck reflex



Child should be upright if possible
Shoulders should be over the hips



Once one switch site emerges a second usually follows. This opens the door for two step scanning

- **One switch moves the second switch selects. This provides the child with complete control over the scanning process.**
- **The child may require physical assistance**
- **Developing eye gaze. Some children will look at what they want. You can train eye gaze responses very reliably.**



Other ways to practice switch access.

According to Linda Burkhart “Research on motor learning shows that developing a motor skill to the level of automaticity requires practice that includes thousands of repetitions with intent, purpose and variation. Automaticity of motor skills means that the individual is able to use a particular movement to Achieve a desired intent without conscious thought toward the execution of that motor task. The intent may originate consciously or unconsciously, but is focused on the purpose of the movement, not the movement itself”. That is projected to be 200 switch hits a day.

Other ways to practice switch hits.

- **Play**
- **Songs**
- **Scripted messages**
- **Adapted activities**

Callie 20 year old girl with CP



A few final thoughts

- If the child can move then they might get up and walk away when the task starts becoming stressful
- Think about sitting on the floor in a corner
- Remove all the distracters
- Interject yourself into their play opportunities
- Tell them what you are going to do and when you are going to do it
- Use of a visual schedule can be helpful in communicating expectations
- Always reward good communication
- Always keep in mind that what they want to say isn't available to them
- Phase out levels of prompts and cues
- Communication is power and with power comes desire to interact
- Never stop analyzing what is working and what isn't
- Be wary of boredom and getting "stuck" in doing the same thing
- Talk to them as if you expect a response.





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