

## **LET THE SWITCH DO THE TALKING: STRATEGIES FOR MIDDLE/SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

### **TYPES OF TALKING SWITCHES**

"Talking Switches" are voice output devices which are often used as a starting place to augment a nonverbal student'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).

### **BENEFITS OF VOICE OUTPUT**

- allows a student to have a way of initiating communication
- provides a means of communication that can be easily understood by both familiar and unfamiliar listeners (even pets!)
- allows students to call out, interrupt, and be assertive in a way that is difficult for other people to ignore. Students learn that 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 student 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 student may begin to understand the meanings or specific words or phrases.
- allows the student 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 school day. Try to find messages, which are the most motivating for the student. Once the student 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, classroom, school, and community. We often tend to think of messages that focus on needs and wants. However, these aren't necessarily the most motivating for the student. Think of using messages that the student doesn't have another effective means 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 student's symbol recognition through an activity-based approach.

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 school 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 school building welcoming and thanking IEP meeting participants	<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 overhead transparencies. Do you have any that she can borrow?</li> <li>• Dad, please sign the permission slip in my back pack so I can go to the law courts next week.</li> </ul>
conversations with peers in the hallway	<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 parents or teachers 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 would like to get out of my wheelchair, please.</li> </ul>
giving directions about a location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome to Parent Night.</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>
page numbers or question numbers for assignments; answers to math games; anagram spelling test (bonus points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn to page 32 of your Science book. Answer all the odd numbered questions.</li> <li>• The answers are 5, 7, 13</li> <li>• What does "vmleadie" spell?</li> </ul>
school jobs: picking up attendance sheets; delivering sheets to secretary; photocopying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have your attendance slip?</li> <li>• Here are the attendance sheets, Mrs. Smith. Can I help with the photo-copying.</li> </ul>
taking a lunch order for a teacher	<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>
science experiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For this experiment, you will need... (list materials/equipment)*</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</li> </ul>

	large bowl, etc.*
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>
Woodworking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The safety rules are..*</li> </ul>
Cafeteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The specials today are</li> <li>chicken strips, and curly fries for \$3.50</li> <li>crisp, tangy Caesar salad and soup for just \$4.00.</li> <li>burgers and fries or salad for \$4.50.*</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 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'm 15. How about you?</li> <li>I love Rottweilers, going on walks, listening to Nelly Furtado, and cruising the halls.</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 in the hall, I look at you to say "hi" back.</li> <li>Don't be a stranger!</li> </ul>
helping a peer study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key points to study</li> <li>Key questions for review</li> <li>Steps to follow for a peer to learn something new</li> </ul>
help hand out corrected papers to classmates with a message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Here's your test back.</li> </ul>
share weekend or evening activities for classmate to write in the student's journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Could you write down: watch the special on the World Skating Championships on Saturday night.</li> </ul>
participate in IEP meeting by sharing personal strengths, interests, progress, or goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I really love being in the band class.</li> <li>I think I'm a lot better using my switch.</li> </ul>
requesting something, such as a particular piece of music in band	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can we play "Swinging Shepherd Blues?" today?</li> </ul>
compliment others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I like your new hair style.</li> </ul>
announce the next drill or play music during physical education class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The next exercise is 25 crunches.</li> <li>Everyone count off by fours.</li> <li>The ones play against the threes; the twos play against the fours.</li> </ul>
asking questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can I sit by Lisa today?</li> </ul>
giving directions for a test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get out your pencils.</li> <li>Put your name, date, and block number at the top of the test.</li> <li>Pass your tests to the first person in your row.</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 student 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.**

