Using Core Boards

*Guide for communication partners, teaching staff and parents/carers.*

Although we talk about children and young people in this document, the principles can equally be applied to adult users of core boards.

Note, core boards can be used by people with a broad range of cognitive abilities – from no cognitive challenges to significant cognitive challenges.

Aims

* Know what a core board is
* Understand the principles of using a core board
* Practice using it to facilitate positive communication

What is a core board?

A core board contains very high frequency words ("core words"). Words that we use a lot. The words/symbols can be used flexibly in many different situations. Examples of these types of words: go, good, little, you, that, on.

Most words are classed as "fringe" words. These are words we don't use all the time. There are many words which we might not say for days, weeks or months. Even words that seem quite common – for example "cat".

Why use a core board?

* Easy to use and carry around – not bulked out by lots of "fringe" words which would need a large book, or complex communication device
* Easy to learn where things are
* Only has the most useful words

A core board can be used very flexibly. It helps the user to cue you in to what they want to say, it helps you to ask the right questions. Some additional context can help: for example, a child or young person plays a message from their message switch they brought in from home: you can now have a conversation with them about what they did.

Using a core board

How many words/symbols?

It's best to start with more than less (assumed competence). Typically, boards have up to around 50 symbols – but it varies.

Key principles

1. Make sure the board is always available to the person using it: it's their voice.
2. Use a core board yourself. Use it when you are talking.
3. Have your own core board – don't use the child or young person's, unless they are not yet aware of it themself, and need you to model what to do with it on their own board.
4. Use it flexibly:

* There may be words on there which you say – for example "I", "you", "finish".
* Other times there might not be – for example, "do" could apply to a lot of actions, "make" could be used for build, create and so on.

1. Never teach, always model -"inspire, don't require". Always accept what a child has indicated (error-free – no right or wrong communication). You can say the word a child has pointed to (and indicate on your own board), respond to it naturally (as in a conversation) with a question or a comment or whatever.
2. Always respond to the child or young person's communication – whatever way they have expressed it. Don't force them to communicate something in a different way if they've already got their message across to you. Respond using your core board.
3. Do things that are motivating for the child/young person: people don't communicate about things they are not interested in. They don't communicate if there is no reason to communicate. So, make sure there is a reason to communicate.
4. You might want to focus on certain core words.

Practical

Some ideas for words to use in different contexts. Each example starts with the core word. The words you might actually say are in brackets.

* Singing a song:
* Go (let’s go, let’s start singing)
* Stop (stop, let’s end the song)
* More (let’s do more, let's do another song)
* Same (let's do the same song again)
* Different (let's do a different song)
* Finished
* Ready steady go: tower of bricks
* More, again (more, let’s get another brick)
* What, which (which brick?)
* Up (up, higher!)
* Look (are you ready?)
* When, time (wait)
* Go!
* Down (it fell down!)
* Reading a book
* Look (look at the ...)
* Turn (turn the page)
* Bad (oh no! – commenting on the story)
* No, not (oh no!)
* Finished
* More, again (another page)
* More, again (another story?)
* Open (open the flap)

*Find core words in the story – e.g., who, here, look*

* Cookery
* Turn (stir, mix)
* Put, in (put in)
* In (put in, pour in)
* More, again (more flour, more sugar)
* Help (do you want help? Help me)
* Do (do some cooking)
* Out (take out)
* Where (where's the spoon?)
* Music
* On (turn on)
* Off (turn off)
* What, which (What next?)
* Want, different (I want a different song)
* More, again (let's listen to some more, let's listen to it again)
* Like (l like it)
* Good (It's good)
* Bad (It's boring)
* Up (louder)
* Down (quieter)
* Maths
* Turn (roll the dice)
* I, my (I've got it!)
* Up (bigger, more)
* Down (smaller, less, fewer)
* I, my; go, gone (my go)
* Bubbles
* Turn (unscrew the top)
* Open (open the lid)
* Out (take the wand out)
* Go (blow)
* More, again (more bubbles?)
* Ln (put the wand in)
* On (put the lid on)
* Turn (screw it up)

Try it out

Role play in pairs.

* One person is the child/young person – they can point to the pictures (and look and point at other things) but are not allowed to talk. The other person is the adult/communication partner.
* Choose an activity from the list above (or a different one) and use the principles above.

Resources

<https://commtap.org>

Search for “core boards” on the Commtap resources website – <https://en.commtap.org> for some examples.