

## Communication Systems - Low Tech Eye Gaze Spelling Boards

Many people experience communication difficulties as a result of injury or conditions such as head injury, stroke or motor neurone disease. A speech pathologist can assist the individual, and their family and friends to find ways to improve communication. They may recommend the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

AAC strategies include using written words, spelling boards, picture symbol books, key word signing, and speech generating devices. While there are basic strategies that anyone can try, an effective communication system is as individual as the person who uses it. The AAC system must take into account the person's skills and communication style, their communication partners, the environment/s in which they communicate, and the functions of their communication.

This fact sheet focuses on low tech eye gaze spelling boards. An eye gaze communication board is a piece of low-tech equipment that can be used by the person and a communication partner. It allows the person to communicate by pointing with their eyes. Even if you have a high-tech device, using an eye gaze communication board to communicate can be a useful strategy if you are ever without your communication device.

To use an eye gaze spelling board successfully, the individual will need to be able to control their eye movements effectively. The person needs to be able to direct their eyes in different directions when using an eye gaze communication board.

Some users can use eye gaze spelling boards to spell out their messages. Please be aware that although a person may understand what you say to them and be able to read, they may still find spelling difficult and confronting. They may have difficulty thinking of the words they want to use, as well as problems remembering what they were spelling. Look out for signs of frustration or embarrassment and try to set the

person at ease. You may need to consult a speech pathologist to find another way of communicating.

Low tech eye gaze communication boards can also be designed around phrases or individual words. Talk to a speech pathologist and/or occupational therapist to find out more.

## **Making a Spelling Board**

You can make a simple, low-tech eye gaze spelling board using paper, pens, and cardboard. You may laminate or place it in a plastic sleeve for durability. For a more professional looking result use the computer to print a spelling board. Commercial boards are also available. Talk to ILCT for information on where you can find them.

A speech pathologist can also assist you to design and produce an eye gaze spelling board best suited to the person using it

## **Instructions to make and use the eye gaze frame**

1. Print out page 5 & 6 of this information sheet using double sided colour printing (preferably laminate with a laminator). Cut out the squares in the middle.
2. The eye gaze person looks at the board, and the assistant looks at the person through the square in the middle. This makes it easier to see what letter box the person is looking at.
3. The eye gaze person looks at the preferred letter on the eye gaze board, the assistant sees the block that the letter is located in.
4. The person looks at the colour block that is the colour of the letter they want. The assistant looks through the square at frame. The assistant sees the colour of the letter.
5. The letter chosen is the one in that letter block in step 3 with the colour code in step 4. The person has to look twice for coding each letter.
6. When spelling, the "tick" symbol can be used to indicate the completion of a word. The "cross" symbol can be used to indicate the command "backspace". The "tick" and "cross" symbols can also be used by the person to indicate "yes" or "no" when a yes/no question is asked.

If possible, help the person with manual word prediction to speed up the process. For example, if you guess which word the person means based on what he or she has spelled so far, you can say the word aloud and ask if that is what the person means. If you guessed correctly, you will save time spelling the rest of the word. Try

to be sensitive to what the person wants, and not to make the person feel you want to hurry them.

## **What can go wrong?**

The biggest problem with low tech eye gaze is for the 'listening' assistant rather than the person. Eye gaze can be a bit 'intangible' and can go very quickly, so it can be difficult to be sure that you have seen and read the person's eye movements accurately. Many people will look very quickly at the item then look away again, rather than fixing on the item for a long time. As a communication assistant, you will need to pick this up and react appropriately.

## **Hints for being a good communication partner**

- Find a quiet space to sit and allow plenty of time.
- As the person selects the letters, say them out loud so they know you've understood. You may want to write them down so you can follow along.
- It is okay to say you don't understand.
- Ask the person if it's okay before guessing and finishing off their words. While it can speed up the conversation, it may frustrate the person, especially if you are on the wrong track.
- "Listen" with your eyes and your ears.
- Be aware that using any form of alternative communication takes time and energy, there will be times that the person just doesn't feel like communicating.
- For quick communication it may be easier to ask questions that the person can answer with a "yes" or "no". Just make sure this is not the only type of communication you use.

# More information

For further information, or advice, about any item contained in this information sheet, please contact Independent Living Centre Tasmania Inc.(ILCT):

- Call 1300 452 827 to speak to a health professional.
- Visit our website [www.ilct.com.au](http://www.ilct.com.au) or email [info@ilct.com.au](mailto:info@ilct.com.au).
- ILCT visits communities around Tasmania. Contact ILCT to find out when we will be in your area.

ILCT provides Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Speech Pathology, and Allied Health Assistant services, on a fee-for-service basis. Our team delivers comprehensive assessments and support that may include assistive technology, home modifications, communication aids, and other tailored interventions to enhance independence and quality of life.

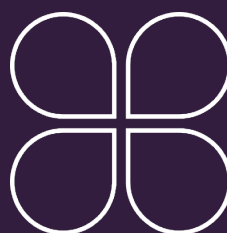
ILCT specifically provides supports to those aged over 18, who are Tasmanian residents and are of any culturally-diverse background. ILCT are a registered provider under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

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