Choo, Choo, Choose!
Looking to Choose/Touching to Choose

Children who are blind or visually impaired need to be able to make intentional choices rather than adults making all choices for them. The environment needs to be adapted to support their choice-making opportunities. The child can choose using their strengths -- reaching, touching, vocalizing, moving, and looking. The parent learns to read the unique cues from their child. This is a way for a little one to let the parent know what they like and a way for the parent to let them know that they are heard. Choice making is shared joy!

Duration

This activity will take 5 to 10 minutes depending on your child's mood and interest.

Materials Required

Choose an object or toy that your child really likes and an object or toy that your child isn't as interested in. Choose objects and toys that your child is familiar with because they need to know them well to make a choice.

Activity Steps

1. Talk with your speech therapist and your Early Intervention Teacher of the Visually Impaired (EI-TVI) about this experience so that you can work together to share special knowledge: What are your child's current communication goals and strategies? What are you already doing during your visits? What special techniques help your child with low vision or blindness learn?

2. Let's start with just two objects or toys to make it easier to understand the choice and then make it.

3. Consider your child's strengths. What works best: Looking to choose or touching to choose or a combination? If your child is using their vision to make a choice, let's make sure the object is presented in the best way to meet their visual learning style. What distance is best? Do we need to reduce clutter? Do we need to reduce distractions? What visual field is best? If your child is using touch to make a choice, let's make sure that the object is presented in the best way to meet their tactile learning style. Invite the child to touch and model touching using hand-under-hand. It's okay if the child doesn't want to touch. Never force your child to touch something because this will harm the trust and communication you've already built with your child.

4. Make up a song to use right before giving the opportunity to make choices to prep the child for the activity, such as "It's time to eat, let's choo-choose!" "It's time to dress, let's choo-choose!" "It's time to play, let's choo-choose!"

5. Show the child the two objects/toys that you want to teach them to choose from (visually and/or tactually). Use hand-under-hand to encourage the child to touch the item. Even if the child doesn't want to touch the object, the adult can touch/tap/scratch on the object to make a noise. The noise an object makes when you touch it gives the child additional knowledge. Also, label the object simply. Here's an example of how your conversation might go:

   - "Duck." Give extra time depending on your child's needs, maybe five seconds, maybe 20.

   - "Let's touch it." Give time.

   - "You can play with your duck if you want." Give time.

   - "Let me show you your other choice." Give time.

   - "Cup." Give time.

   - "Let's touch it." Give time.

   - "You can play with the cup if you want." Give time.

6. Let them touch and/or look (whatever their preference). Silently count in your head to make sure you are giving your child enough time to think about their choice and to give you time to observe and to witness the cues that signify the decision. They might look longer at the item they want. They might look and then look away and then reach. They might show excitement or a movement in their body. They might vocalize. Their body might still when you name the choice, touch the choice, or look at the choice.

7. They might not do anything for a while so choice making might be hard to read. Take your time and try not to rush the activity. If you see a sign that you think might mean that they want a specific item, let the child know that you heard them and reinforce that communication (movement, stilling, or vocalization). Label the cue by saying, "You wiggled, I see you want the cup!"

8. Immediately after you see that they made the choice, give them what they want or what you think they want and label it multiple times so that they can make the connection. "Cup." Pause. "You want the cup."

9. It's okay if you aren't sure if a specific movement, vocalization, etc. meant that the child wants it. With repetition, the child will learn that every time she does that specific thing, she will get what she wants.

Tips

- Touch choices can be made with feet.

- No one communicates well if stressed; for example, if your child is hungry maybe they won't be able to make a choice. If you are in an unfamiliar place or if the place is chaotic, your child might not be able to make a choice.

Next Steps

- Let your child choose an interaction with you. For example, "Do you want kisses, or do you want tickles?" "Do you want hugs, or do you want bouncing?"

- You can teach your child to make choices throughout every routine of the day. For example, while eating, you can give your little one a choice between two different foods or the food and the drink. During dressing, you can give your little one a choice between putting on their shirt first or their pants first and/or they can choose their fuzzy red shirt or their smooth purple shirt.

- You can use movements to represent song choices. A rocking movement can be "Row, Row Your Boat." Move your hands above your head for, "Do you want to play SO BIG?"

Clapping can be "Pat-a-Cake." The choices are endless. It is up to what your little one likes and the movement they use.

- You can also choose an activity or song using an object symbol. For example, a blanket can represent swinging if the child lies in a blanket when you swing them. A bell can represent the song "Jingle Bells." Pom poms can represent a cheer.

- After choice making using objects is achieved, you can move to choice making using part of the object, a picture of the object, or a tactual picture of the object.

1. Looking at the choices.

2. Thinking about the choices.

3. Made the choice.