

Offering Choices

Parents and familiar adults often understand what a child wants without them needing to request it. However, it is important children have opportunities to make choices as this encourages communication. If successful, the child is more likely to be motivated to communicate further choices.

Children may make choices in different ways. They may look, use facial expressions, point, use gesture, sign, a symbol, sound or the word to make their choice. All of these should be encouraged and accepted. All are ways of communicating.

START SIMPLE

Here is an example of offering a choice at snack time.

- **OFFER A CHOICE OF TWO ITEMS.**

Start with a liked and disliked item to help teach what choice making is. Use small portions each time so there are opportunities to repeat the activity (e.g. cut an apple into three portions).

- **HOLD BOTH ITEMS UP AND CLEARLY LABEL EACH OF THEM.**

For example, say “do you want **apple** or **raisins**?”. Always offer both items and hand over the item they indicate, even if you know they would never choose one of the options. The choice can be offered again shortly.

If you are working on / using Makaton signs or symbols this is a good opportunity to model these along with the word.

- **WAIT AND WATCH**

What do they do? If they reach toward the item they want or look towards it, label it for them “you want apple” and hand it over.



Never ask your child to copy what you said. If they spontaneously repeat then that's great, but asking them to copy can be too much pressure. Simply model (name the word) and wait.

MAKING CHOICES ABOUT ACTIVITIES

The opportunities to offer choices are endless. Often because we have a routine and we know what the child wants we don't offer these choices and opportunities can be missed. Think about the times of the day when your child could make a choice such as:

Getting dressed – “do you want the red or blue t-shirt?”

Bath time - “do you want the cups or the duck toy?”

Snack time – “do you want juice or water?”, “crisps or raisins?”, “food or drink?”

Play time – “do you want the football or sand?”

CHECK THEY ARE MAKING A CHOICE

Offer a preferred and non-preferred item, next time switch them round. Some children will always show a preference to the left or right side. Swapping them round helps to check they understand the choices made.

Once your child is choosing between two, try offering a choice of three.

NEXT STEP ... USING SYMBOLS



First, offer the real items **and** the symbols.

Next, move towards your child choosing from a choice of symbols only.

This will help you to offer choices when you can't show the real items. For example “do you want to go to the park or swimming?”

CHOICE BOARDS

Once your child can choose from 3 symbols they may be ready to use a 'choice board'. This will give them more freedom to select activities. For certain activities, choice boards activities can be laminated and displayed near to those activities e.g. a snack choice board in the kitchen, a water play choice board in the bathroom, a toy choice board in the bedroom.



Offering choices can sometimes be restrictive e.g. if the adult asks “do you want cars and books?” but the child wants neither the child may appear to not respond or move away. Try teaching “**something different**” or “**show me**” to help avoid the child getting frustrated.