

## Auditory Cues

Sound cues are a natural way to get a child's attention. At first, most children tend to be more responsive to rhythmic sound or exaggerated intonation.

In order for the child to make use of sounds as meaningful cues, background noise (i.e., television, radio, and other distracting environmental sounds) should be eliminated as much as possible so that the child can focus on the auditory cues.

Some kinds of sounds may be irritating to a particular child. For example, some children with disabilities are extremely sensitive and may overreact to any increase in loudness. Also, sudden bursts of sound may cause a child to startle and even cry. Some environments cause sound reverberation that may be irritating and may make it more difficult for the child who has hearing loss or auditory processing disorder to attend to and localize specific sounds. Generally, this occurs in rooms with little sound-absorbing material. For example, a kitchen with a tile floor and no curtains would be a much more resonant noise environment than a living room with carpet, curtains, and overstuffed furniture. Many children who have a hearing loss have some residual hearing and can perceive some sounds.

Here are some sound cues that may work for your child:

- Click the spoon on the side of the bowl before giving your child a bite.
- Gently tap the cup on the table before giving your child a drink.
- Sing a few lines of the theme song of your child's favorite television show before turning on the television.
- Shake your child's bottle of milk near his or her head before putting the nipple to his or her mouth.

Here are some word cues that may work for your child:

- Say your child's name when you are about to present something to him or her, when you are about to interact with him or her, or when you are about to greet him or her.
- In simple language, tell your child what you are about to do (e.g., "Mama's going to wash your face now.").
- Use single key words as cues (e.g., "wash," "dinner").

## Tactile Cues

Tactile cues involve touching your child in a specific way to let him or her know what is about to happen. They are very helpful for communicating with young children who have severe physical disabilities and developmental delays or severe visual impairments and hearing loss.

Touch cues should be precise, perceivable, and pleasant for the child in order to support attention and anticipation of an activity. Use one touch cue at a time. It will be more difficult for a child with severe disabilities to learn the exact meaning of a touch cue if more than one touch cue is used in a single activity or if the cue occurs simultaneously with touching the child during physical handling and interaction. Certain types of touch on specific body areas may elicit reflex movements in some children with motor or neurological impairments.

Other young children with medical needs dislike being touched on the bottom of the foot because of their experience with medical interventions. In general, a firm or deep pressure touch is more easily tolerated than a light, feathery stroke. However, the type of touch and placement of each touch cue should be selected carefully for the individual child, then used systematically.

[(ere are some touch cues that may work for your child:

- Before washing your child's face, stroke his or her cheek.
- Before giving your child a drink from a cup, hold his or her chin.
- Tap your child's lips twice with your fingers before giving him or her the first bite of food.

Here is a manual cue that may work for your child:

- Before giving your child a bite of food, physically guide him or her to sign the word EAF (i.e., sign coactively).

Here are some object cues that may work for your child:

- Touch the washcloth to your child's hand before putting him or her into the bath tub.
- When dressing your child, touch the shirt to your child's chest before putting it on him or her.

## Olfactory Cues

Smells associated with objects and people can be used as olfactory cues. Your child may anticipate that you are going to pick him or her up if you always wear the same cologne. Some children may be very sensitive to certain smells, yet other children may not seem to notice them. Carefully observe your child's preferences and responses to smells. Some children are extremely sensitive to cologne and other strong odors. You will need to observe carefully to determine whether certain odors produce overstimulation or a negative reaction from your child.

Here are some smell cues that may work for your child:

- Before washing your child's hair, let him or her smell the shampoo.
- Let your child smell the food in the bowl before giving him or her the first bite.
- Make it a habit to wear the same cologne on your wrists. Before picking up your child, hold your wrist close to his or her nose, then greet your child.

*PI. AI: A Guide to Early Communication with Young Children Who Have Multiple Disabilities 02000 by Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.*

## Kinesthetic Cues

Kinesthetic or movement cues are actually combinations of movement and *tactile* sensation. They involve handling, positioning, and moving your child in certain ways associated with the upcoming activity. If a child has cerebral palsy, kinesthetic cues should be selected with consideration for the child's muscle tone. Children with low tone (*hypotonia*) tend to mold easily when held but may be difficult to arouse. They usually benefit from physical stimulation, handling, and positioning that increase muscle tone and arouse attention. Children with high tone (*hypertonia*) may be irritable and difficult to hold. Specific positioning and careful handling will be needed to reduce tone and improve the quality, amount, and range of the child's movements. Do not use kinesthetic cues that elicit reflexive or involuntary movements (e.g., turning the child's head to one side causes the child's legs and arms to move in the same direction or if swinging the child without proper positioning and support triggers trunk and limb extension). In general, hold and support your child while moving him or her so that he or she can maintain a symmetrical and flexed body position.

Here are some whole body movement cues that may work for your child:

- Before sitting down to rock your child in a rocking chair, rock back and forth while holding him or her at your shoulder.
- Hold your child away from your body, and gently swing him or her before putting your child in an infant swing.

Here are some limb movement cues that may work for your child:

- Before lifting your child out of the highchair, lift up slightly on his or her elbows.
- Lift your child's arms above his or her head before taking his or her shirt off.
- Clap your child's hands together once before playing Pat-a-cake.

## Visual Cues

The use of color, contrast, lighting, spacing, and arrangement can make an object more visible to children with severe disabilities. Objects can be seen more easily when they are against a solid, glare-free background of contrasting color. For example, a white bowl on a blue place mat has better contrast than a white bowl on a white highchair tray. The human face is a low-contrast visual image, so a child with visual impairment may have difficulty recognizing his or her dark-skinned, brown-haired mother who is wearing a tan blouse and is sitting in front of a wall of wood paneling. Contrast can be used to make the mother's face easier to see: The mother might put on bright lipstick, wear a blue blouse, or sit in front of a white wall.

Distracting visual objects should be reduced so that your child's visual attention can be engaged. For example, some children may be distracted from the activity if they face an open window with bright sunshine, or they will have difficulty seeing an object that is placed among other toys or on a patterned quilt. Visual cues should be presented within the child's visual field, and the child should be encouraged to look at and (when appropriate) touch the object. Systematic and consistent use of color, lighting, and contrast can assist your child in organizing visual information and in recognizing familiar situations.

Here is a lighting cue that may work for your child:

- Before beginning a familiar activity, use a flashlight in a dimly lit area to focus your child's attention on a specific object that will be used first in the activity (e.g., highlight a favorite toy, cup, or your face).

Here are some contrast cues that may work for your child:

- Before placing your child in the highchair, place a brightly colored bowl on the highchair to signal meal time.
- Before placing your child on the floor, place a colorful favorite toy on a different solid-colored quilt to indicate playtime.

Here is a color cue that may work for your child:

- Select objects in black, white, and primary colors to use as cues for daily activities (e.g., use a blue washcloth to indicate bath time, or select a yellow bottle or red cup for your child's milk).

Here is a manual cue that may work for your child:

- Use a conventional gesture or key word sign of appropriate) to signal an activity. Make these hand movements slowly, and repeat them. Wear a solid, high contrast shirt to make your hands easy to see.