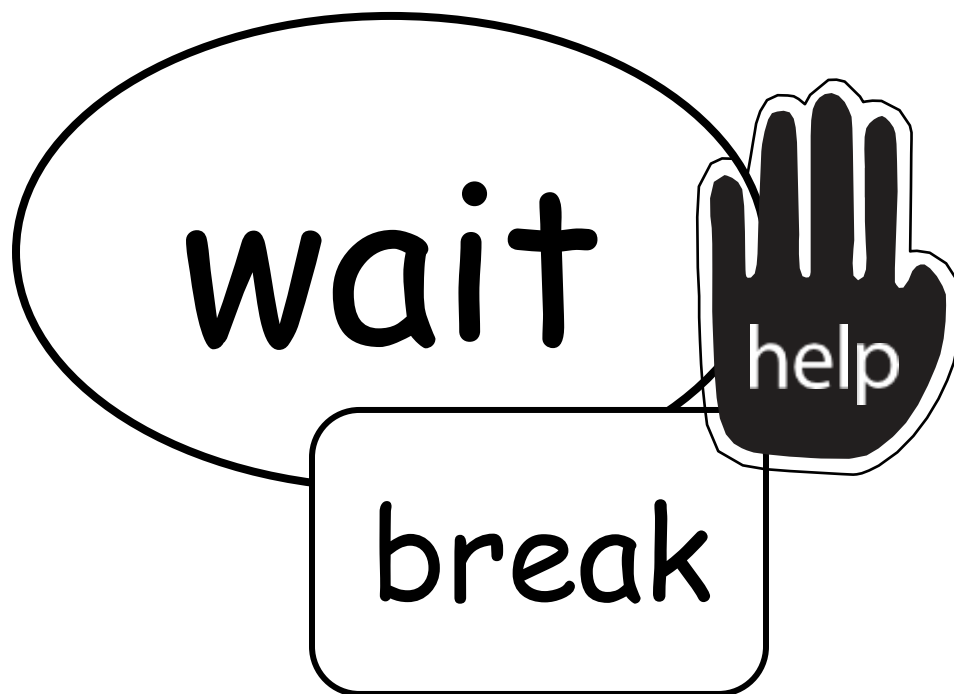


Mini Help, Break & Wait

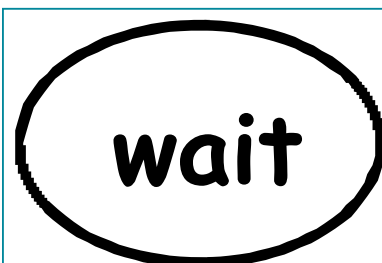
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Visual strategies for all learners regardless of their expressive communication modality — speech, pictures, sign, or graphic modes!



When we initially are teaching students to request desired items; we create many opportunities for those requests. We try to reinforce each appropriate request by giving the student immediate access to the item or activity. But, once a student is reliably and consistently requesting desired items, we eventually will need to teach the student that he can't always immediately get what he requested. We all occasionally

have to wait for something we want! If a student has learned to request via PECS or vocally, then he can be taught to wait for a short period of time immediately after making a request. If conducted in a systematic manner, this training can result in the student being able to wait for several minutes, even during situations where staff have not anticipated the need for waiting. The first several "waiting" opportunities should take place only when the trainer can absolutely control how long the student will need to wait. The basic sequence for teaching a student to wait is:

1. When the student makes a request for something, give him the "wait" card.
2. Pause for 1 to 2 seconds.
3. Take the "wait" card back while saying, "Nice waiting!" and simultaneously giving the student the requested item.

Over time the interval to wait is gradually increased once the student is successful at the majority (80-90%) of "Wait" opportunities of the target duration. When increasing the wait interval, a general guideline to follow is to increase by 50% of the successful interval. So, go from 2 to 3 seconds, then 3- 4½ seconds, etc.

If the student is not successful at a specific training opportunity, shorten the next wait interval so that he once again achieves success. Remain at this level for several opportunities and then systematically begin increasing the interval again.

Once any student is waiting for more than a minute, allow him to hold or play with a small item just like we do when we are waiting for our dentist appointment! Continue to have the child keep the "wait" card with him.

For how long should any child learn to wait? Remember in the "real world" we often see children having difficulties waiting, so make sure to set realistic goals. A couple of minutes for a two-year old is realistic; fifteen minutes for a 3-year-old is not. A good strategy when setting goals is to look at students in mainstream environments and determine how long these students successfully wait.

Everyone takes breaks. We take breaks to escape from activities that involve high demands or that are boring. A break is different than 'quitting' because we know we will return to the activity after a break (like a vacation). Adults have formal and informal breaks at work. Elementary students have recess while older students have breaks between classes or at lunch. Students with communication deficits also need and take breaks. If they don't have a calm, effective strategy for letting us know they need a break, often they engage in inappropriate behaviors as a way of escaping from a task. Teaching a student to use a break card begins only if we know when a break is wanted. Typically, lessons that are boring, demanding, or too difficult are those from which our students want to break. In addition, when reinforcement rates drop too low, students want breaks. Once you have identified these situations, begin training by creating one of these lessons. Use the **2-Person Prompting Procedure** (*The Picture Exchange Communication System Training Manual, 3rd Edition* (Frost & Bondy, 2024)) to teach the following:

break

- The communicative partner creates a stressful situation. The physical prompter, **BEFORE** or **JUST AS** the student engages in inappropriate behavior, prompts him to exchange the break icon. The communicative partner in turn directs the student to the "break area," sets a timer for 2-3 minutes and then leaves the student in this demand-free situation. Once the timer rings, the student **MUST** return to the same activity. He likely will want another break, so repeat the same process.

break

break

break

break

- Remember, if the student takes or wants too many breaks, you should assess the reinforcement available to him within that lesson and whether he is aware of the potential reinforcer. For information on creating and using powerful reinforcement systems, *The Pyramid Approach to Education, 2nd Edition* (Bondy, 2011).

- Once the student independently asks for breaks, provide him with a visual strategy for predicting how many breaks he can have within an activity or across a specified time period (just as we know how many vacation days we have during the year). For example, give the student several break cards. Begin by giving him more cards than he typically uses during the specified time period. As he exchanges a break card, do not give him that card back. Over time, you may want to gradually reduce the number of breaks available for each work period but be sure not to eliminate the opportunity! It is appropriate for your student to take a break, on average, every two-three hours.

When something isn't functioning the way typically developing young children like, they quickly learn to get an adult's assistance. If an item is small but doesn't work, they may take it to an adult; if it is large, they may bring the adult to the problem itself. These actions are usually learned even before the child has learned to say, "help!" Children with communication deficits must learn to approach others in order to initiate communicative interactions for a variety of outcomes, including seeking assistance. This social approach is taught within the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) training protocol. Once children independently are approaching others to gain access to desired items, they can learn to approach others to get help. *Using the 2-Person Prompting Procedure teach the following:*

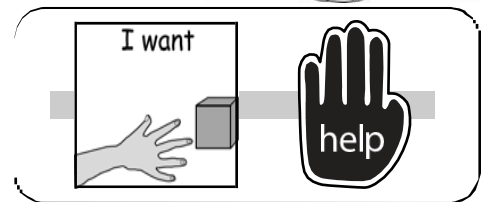


Step 1: Exchanging the "help" icon.

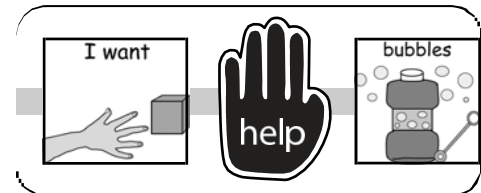
When the communicative partner creates a problem for the child, the physical prompter helps the child to exchange the 'help' icon.



Step 2: Using the "help" icon in a sentence. When the student has mastered PECS Phase IV, or when he is saying, writing or signing simple sentences, teach him to incorporate the "help" into these sentences.



Step 3: Expanding the help request. Teach the student to specify what type of help he needs



For detailed information on teaching these critical communication skills
with visual strategies, contact

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