

## **Getting Started with Picture Cards**

It works best with two adults but it can be done with one. At the beginning, do it with two adults as much as you can.

Avoid giving any prompts, like "what do you want?" Try to be silent throughout EXCEPT for saying the name of the item when you do the exchange.

Have the item that your child wants in view but not so he/she can grab it. Make sure you can put your hands on it quickly and easily, though, for the exchange.

When your child reaches for it, put the picture card for that item in his/her hand and have him/her give it to you.

Immediately give him/her the item and say the name of the item as you point to the picture on the card

Warning: It is hard to get a child to understand the picture exchange system because it is something new and different. It will take some time!

Children learn this the fastest when:

- the picture exchange is ALWAYS used for the item (so you would never give the item to your child without doing an exchange)
- there are opportunities throughout the day to do an exchange
  - example: you have decided to teach "drink" and have a picture card of your child's cup. In order to teach this the fastest, put only a small bit of juice in the cup each time. This way your child will have to request over and over again. This gives your child more practice. If you fill up the cup, he/she might not have to ask for more juice again for an hour or two or three!

If the picture card is a food or drink item (often the easiest things to start with) consider having multiple cards and putting one on the frig and others in strategic places around the house. What you hope will happen is that your child will see the card and bring it to you! If that happens, drop everything (if you can) and do the exchange immediately (if you can) so he/she further understands that he/she has communicated with you and that you have understood him/her.

## **More Ideas for Picture Cards**

- 1) Take picture cards and put them into a book. “Read” this book with your child, reviewing the names of the items. If you have the real object, help your child match it to the picture.
- 2) Use picture cards to create a schedule of the entire day or just part of the routine (maybe the bedtime routine – dinner, play, snack, bath, brush teeth, story, bed). Each time you are ready to move to a different part of the routine, go to the schedule, have your child take the picture of the next part of the routine, and carry it with you. Ideally, you would have a place to put the picture card (for example, when he/she goes to brush his/her teeth, he/she would carry the picture card for brushing teeth and there would be a piece of Velcro somewhere nearby and he/she could place the card there).
- 3) Use picture cards to label common objects in your house that your child is interested in or uses. For example, label his/her dresser with picture cards – have a picture of a sock on the sock drawer, a picture of shirts on the shirt drawer, etc.

When making picture cards, it is suggested to also include the printed word on the card. Every once in a while, a child learns to read early and connecting the picture and the word can’t hurt!