

Partner Assisted Scanning

Imagine going to McDonalds with Marcia, a little girl who doesn't talk yet but who definitely knows what she wants. Marcia will not be able to say "I want a cheeseburger Happy Meal" or "I want orange juice" when her mother asks her what she wants to eat and drink. Because she is so small, she also won't be able to point to the pictures or words on the menu boards over the cashiers' heads. The problem is that Marcia's mother knows that if she doesn't find out what Marcia really wants before ordering, Marcia will have a tantrum. What should she do?



Fast Food

To figure out what kind of Happy Meal Marcia wants, her mother asks "do you want a hamburger...a cheeseburger...chicken nuggets?" When Marcia hears what she wants she nods her head "Yes". Her mother then asks Marcia another question. Soon she finds out exactly what Marcia wants to eat and orders Marcia her favorite meal.

Marcia's mother used something called partner assisted scanning to determine what Marcia wanted for lunch. Instead of guessing what Marcia wanted to eat, her mother named, or "scanned" through, a variety of items. Marcia was expected to make her choice by nodding her head, when she heard the item she wanted the most.

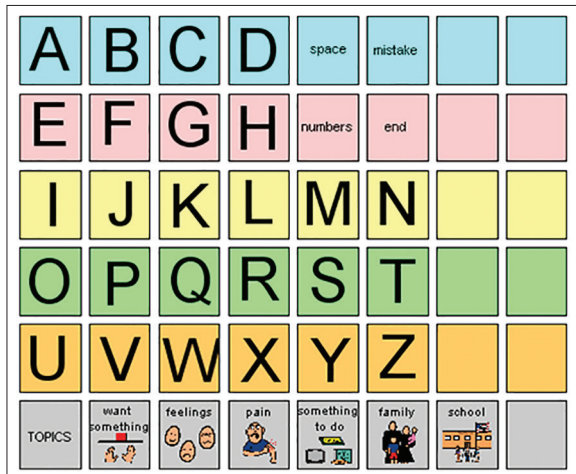
Partner assisted scanning can be used with people who don't speak, and with people whose speech is very hard to understand. It should only be used with people who can't point to messages on a communication board or letter board easily by themselves. Partner assisted scanning may be easier because all they have to do is listen to choices being read and do one thing that means "Yes." This could be almost anything--nodding, blinking, moving a hand, or any other easy movement.

If partner assisted scanning sounds familiar, it may be because it is similar to scanning using a communication device. Instead of having the device scan through each message or group of messages, a person does it instead. Partner assisted scanning can be a "low-tech" and simple way to communicate when a high-tech device is not available.

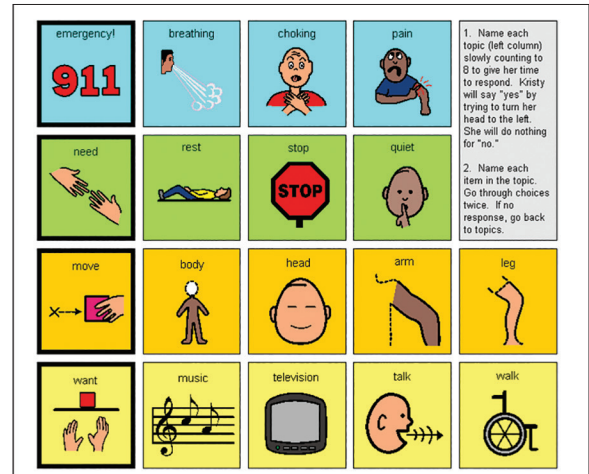
If you are using a communication board, partner assisted scanning is almost the same as what Marcia's mother did--naming each choice on the board one at a time until the person signals "Yes." However, if a person has many different messages to communicate or wants to be able to spell, it could take a long time to name each message or letter through the alphabet. Here are some ideas to help speed up the rate of communication using partner assisted scanning.

- Group some of the choices together (e.g., messages that fall in the same category)
- Say the name of each row (e.g., "A" row, "E" row, or "green" row, or "emergency" row)

Ask the person to signal “yes” when you name the right group and then you would name each message or letter in that group. The person should signal “yes” again when you name the right message or letter. Below are two examples of how a communication board might be organized to use partner assisted scanning in this way.



AEIOU alphabet board



Communication board organized in category rows

Courtesy of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. Revised June 2014, DynaVox.

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