

# The Power of the Pause: Distracted Pause

*The Pause That . . . Reduces Stress!  
Idea from Kate Ahern*

**WHAT AND WHY:** We often hear people talk about an 'expectant pause' meaning that we set up a situation, then pause and look at the individual expectantly, in hopes that they will jump in with a word, a sign, grab their AAC system, etc. But, as Kate Ahern noted, this often does not work for students who have apraxia (or high anxiety). In fact, this may cause them to react like a 'deer in headlights.' Enter the 'distracted pause.' As Kate Ahern explains, a distracted pause is exactly what you think it is. It's when you pause to allow wait time, but instead of gazing expectantly at the person, you look away, look through your bag, whatever, to avoid increasing demand while still allowing wait time. She goes on to explain that distracted pauses lower the pressure so much that it also decreases anxiety, thus decreasing anxiety symptoms.



**WHO IS THIS FOR:** This is for anyone who communicates with people who use AAC, including parents and other family members, peers, teachers, paras, and therapists. It is especially important for people communicating with and teaching individuals who have apraxia. This might include autistic students, and individuals with syndromes such as Angelman, Rett, or Pitt-Hopkins.

## **HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN:**

Here are a few ideas for the distracted pause:

- a) **Take Notes.** Just looking down to take notes is often enough to 'get the juices flowing.'
- b) **Search Through Your Bag.** Or look down at the computer. Or lean down to pick something up off the floor. Any of these will show that you're still here, but not hyper-focused.

**RESULTS:** I have found that students can be their most creative and 'outside the box' after a distracted pause. For example, one student came up with this description of Target during a busy Out & About Community event, filled with distractions. *Nailed it!*

