

TALK

Talk tips include:

- **Color Coding Symbols for AAC Users**
- **E-CASE CLIPCASE Idea**
- **Can We Chat?**

Color Coding Symbols for AAC Users

Contributed by: Caroline Musselwhite 11/99

WHAT?

Color coding can provide incredible support for individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) or other forms of assistive technology (AT). While there are many systems of color coding, we recommend the one suggested by Goossens', Crain, & Elder (1992, p. 73). Their color coding system is:

Verbs (COME, OPEN).....	pink
Descriptors {adjectives and adverbs} (PRETTY, SLOW).....	blue
Prepositions (e.g., IN, OFF).....	green
Nouns (CAR, STRING).....	yellow
Miscellaneous category of interaction words.....	orange
WH-words (e.g., WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE)	
Exclamations (e.g., UH OH, WOW)	
Negative Words (e.g., NO, DON'T)	
Pronouns (e.g., I, YOU)	

Why?

We have found color coding useful for:

- **Communication Displays:** color coding the background of symbols ". . . appears to greatly enhance the ease with which symbols can be identified and quickly located on a communication display" (Goossens', Crain, & Elder, 1992, p. 72). This is true both for augmented communicators and their communication facilitators.

- **Writing Displays:** color coding writing displays (whether using words or symbols) can support students in locating symbols/text and developing an understanding of parts of speech.
- **Facilitator Support:** in addition to supporting partners in facilitating oral or written communication, color coding displays may help ensure that a broad range of parts of speech are included on a display, therefore expanding potential communicative functions. For example, if - after coloring symbols - a teacher observes that the display is only yellow and pink, s/he can conclude that a restricted range of communicative functions is available to that individual (labelling, choosing, directing). More complex communicative functions (teasing, negating, protesting) require including exemplars from other categories, such as the orange category (Wh-words, exclamations, negative words). Thus, color-coding can be a quick "reality check" for potential communicative options!

How?

First, be sure to color code the background, leaving the figure of the symbol white. If you have a strong literacy agenda, you may want to consider leaving the text in a white box as well. Goossens', Crain, & Elder suggest that ". . . this 'background-enhanced' format tends to enhance the shape cues of the figure relative to its background. It also serves to visually break the display into smaller more manageable units." (1992, p. 72).

Color coding can be accomplished by:

- **Using markers:** Goossens', Crain, & Elder caution that markers selected should be transparent, read-through, highlighter pens, and recommend brand names (p. 73). They provide specific suggestions for getting volunteers to support in coloring (See Musselwhite, 1986, *Adaptive Play for Special Needs Children: Strategies to Enhance Communication and Learning*, Chapter 14, Enlisting community support through bartering).
- **Color Copying:** color the original, then photocopy to provide multiples.
- **Using the computer:** the background can be colored on the computer, using a paint program (note, that gets tricky, as you have to use both the <draw> and the <paint> layers!)

Where?

This information was taken from:

Engineering the Classroom Environment for Interactive Symbolic Communication: 18 Months to Five Years Developmentally, by Carol Goossens', Sharon Sapp Crain, and Pamela Elder (1992). Southeast Augmentative Communication Conference Publications, Clinician Series, 2430 11th Avenue, North, Birmingham, AL 35234, \$39.