Tips for Teaching Choice-Making

- A visual representation should be used for each of the choices offered.
- The actual object used all the time should be avoided. Use of symbols should be taught.
- The student should be taught to point, sign, or request.
- Two concrete or obvious choices should be offered initially.
  - One choice may be a desired object or activity and the other a disliked one.
  - Initially say or present the desired object or activity and the disliked one second, and then switch.
  - Use two different objects or activities.
  - Practice repeatedly across environments and people.
  - Honor the student’s choices. The goal of teaching choice-making is for the student to learn the skill of making choices not to have the target object or activity chosen!
- If you notice the student chooses one item or activity and few others, don’t offer that activity or item each time. This teaches the student to choose something that is available. The student may be more comfortable with a rule. The rule is pick one that is offered.
- More choices should be offered once the student shows comfort at the two-choice level.
- It takes energy and attention to make conscious choices. Do not insist on making the student complete the choosing routine on days the student is not up to it. There is comfort in having things decided for oneself on hard days.
- Once the student can choose from concrete items, activities, or people, basic social choice activities should be taught using social scenarios with obvious solutions (e.g., choosing to litter, to hit someone, or to wear a coat). It is helpful to add a visual cue for each choice, if possible. For example, point out the open door on a cold day and hold up the student’s coat, or put litter on the ground or gesture as though throwing it in the wastebasket.

Teaching Social Judgment Skills

- Work with the family to develop a list of social rules. It’s helpful to ask the family what social/friend concerns they have and to add these to your list.
- With the family, suggest possible scenarios for each of the concerns. Usually the scenario or story helps to understand the underlying issue of concern, and then a rule becomes more obvious.
- Teach the social rules:
  - Use a visual cue (written, picture, drawing, object) to help the student remember.
  - Present the social rule and its opposite as concrete choices (i.e., making judgments).
  - Initially, present the choices in artificial situations. Which do you choose? This or this? When a social choice has been made, follow through by giving the student the one she chose.
  - Set up naturalistic situations in which the student might make social judgments in calm settings on good days. Then, move the social judgment-making into real life situations.
  - Always strongly reinforce practice in making judgments. Say, “You did a good job making a judgment. I’m proud of you. How do you feel?”
Remember, choice-making is powerful!

Being given choices reduces challenging behavior and increases the quality of life.