



Tips for Home or School Creating Conversation Boxes

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What is a Conversation Box?

Often children will participate in exciting activities at school or at home. We want them to share this excitement and “talk” to others about the activity -- either at home or at school. However, limited conventional communication skills can make it difficult for some children to “talk” with others. Creating conversation boxes can be one answer to creating conversation opportunities. Conversation boxes allow us to use object symbols as the basis of a conversation for children who understand object symbols (rather than understanding drawings or photos as symbols). One example of a conversation box one that was created for attending a track meet. The photo at the top of the page shows this conversation box, which in this case is just a shoe box covered with contact paper. The water bottle with colored marbles inside of it serves as the “title” of this box (more about this title later).

Stored within the box are various objects related to the activity: The objects related to the activity should be those that are key to the activity **from the child’s point of view**. It is important to note that what the adults think is most exciting or interesting might not be the most exciting or interesting aspects as far as the child is concerned.

“Conversation phrases” were created and placed in the lid of the box as shown above and in the close-up below. The phrases are written as if the child was talking, even though the child might not have the verbal skills to say particular words or phrases. For example, when the child removes the blanket from the conversation box and hands it to a communication partner, the phrase in the box lid helps the partner to understand what the child is saying: “It was really cold and I liked being wrapped in my blanket.” In this example, the bag of rocks represents “I was bored at the track meet. We had to wait a



long time to see my brother. I really liked playing in the rocks.” Yet another example – the bottle with the marbles represents “When my brother ran, we cheered and made noise.”



When the child removes an item from the conversation box, the communication partner uses the phrases to ask questions, make comments, and so forth. The child leads the conversation by “being in charge” of the items in the box and can “talk” about any of the objects from the activity.

Back to the title of the conversation box: you want to be sure to give each conversation box a title that represents the most interesting part of the activity **from the child’s point of view**. In this case the conversation box for the track meet is labeled with the noisemaker made from the water bottle because this is what the child appeared to enjoy the most.

Making Your Own Conversation Box

Step 1: Observe the child during various activities to determine those that are particularly exciting or interesting to the child. Identify those “topics of conversation.”

Step 2: Throughout the activity, observe the child to plan the objects you will need as symbols. You will also plan the conversational phrase that will accompany each object.

Step 3: Write the conversational phrases on small, study cards that can be attached to the lid of the conversation box.

Step 4: Cover your phrase cards with contact paper or laminate them to increase their durability.

Step 5: Velcro your phrases to the box lid so that the cards are easily be changed when you want to create a new conversation box.

Step 6: Gather the object symbols for the conversation box and add them to the box.

Step 7: Use the conversation box over and over to have meaningful conversations with the child.

