

Choosing boards

Why do we use choosing boards?

A **choosing board** shows the choices available to your child using pictures, symbols or printed words depending on what is most meaningful for your child. It can help your child to express a preference or request for something from a choice of two or more options. This is especially useful when the choices might not be things they can see; such as activities (going outside, pouring water) or when toys are out of sight or reach.

Choosing boards can help to develop your child's understanding of spoken words and promote independence and empowerment. It also gives them some control over their day.

How to use a choosing board

- Consider using a board where you are able to attach the symbols. The easiest way to do this is using Velcro on the board and on the back of any pictures or symbols. This gives your child the option of giving you the visual or pointing to it to communicate their choice.
- Start by offering 2 choices and gradually increase the number of symbols you use as this becomes easier for them. Be mindful of the maximum number of choices that are on offer on this board.
- Always gain your child's attention first and point to each of the symbols in turn identifying what they are. For example, if offering a choice of activities, point to each symbol while you say the word it represents i.e. point to the symbol for bubbles and say "bubbles". Remember to keep your language simple.
- When your child indicates their choice, give them the item or activity they have requested straight away.
- Remember children can make 'choices' in different ways so look out for them using a range of 'non-verbal' communication skills as well as spoken language. Children can make a choice through spoken words, a look (eye pointing) or a gesture (reaching, pointing, moving their body/head towards a choice) to let you know what they want.
- Do not use choices that are 'not available' to them. If something is not available for some reason (e.g. you have run out of bubbles or it's too cold/wet to play outside) either do not add it to the choosing board (if you are using detachable symbols) or put a red cross through the symbol using a white board pen (not a permanent marker) to show this is not available. When offering the choices, you can say 'no bubbles today' while shaking your head to support understanding.
- If your child finds it difficult to point to their choice, encourage them to make their choice by looking at the item they want to request (eye pointing).

Introducing symbols or pictures

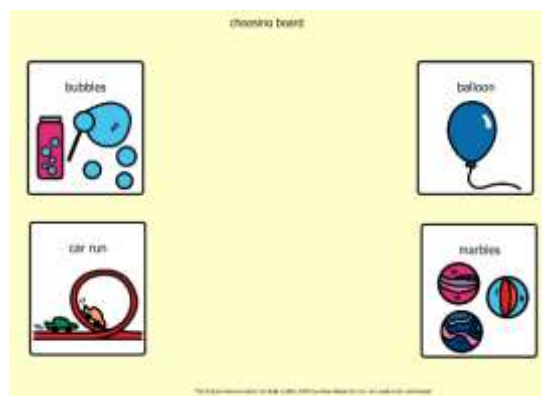
- You can use symbols or pictures on a choosing board, just make sure you use a consistent picture/symbol to represent each different activity or toy. There are different types of symbols available. Talk to your child's school or nursery to see what they use



and if they can share symbols with you to use at home so that you are using the same ones.

- When using symbols or pictures, make sure your child understands what object/activity the symbol relates to. For instance, if introducing a toilet symbol show your child the symbol each time they use the toilet (or are taken to the bathroom) so they can develop an association of the symbol with the activity.
- Each time you add new activities or choices to the choosing board, make sure you demonstrate the activity while showing the child the symbol before you add it to the board.

Examples of choosing boards



How can I use this in real life?

Choosing boards can be used in a range of activities throughout the day at home, school or nursery. Think about all the opportunities across your day when you can offer your child choices and consider introducing a choosing board to support this. This can be in play or in simple everyday activities such as choosing:

- What activity they want to do
- What toy/object they want
- What clothes to wear
- Which story to read
- What to watch on TV
- What to eat at snack/dinner time
- What toy to take out with them
- Where they want to go (park, garden, Nana/Grandad's house)
- What song they want to sing
- Which musical instrument they want to play
- What colours to use in painting/drawing

Using technology

There are some apps available where you can take photos of objects/activities and create choosing boards on your phone or a device:

- Sounding Board by Ablenet available on iPhone
- Choice Board-Creator by Techno Chipmunk Innovations designed for iPad

You might also like to view our 'Making choices' advice sheet to read more about supporting children with the early stages of choosing using real objects.

