

Choice making

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) all children, including those with Additional Support Needs (ASN) and disabilities, have the right to have their views sought and expressed. This is detailed within Article 12 (respect for the views of the child)

“Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.”

UNICEF UK

Choice making is a life skill and the development of this starts from the earliest days of infancy. For some children developing this skill may require individualised support using the knowledge and expertise of the family and team around the child. It is important to remember that being able to make choices, in whatever form, is a child's right and ensures that we are hearing their voice.

The benefits of being able to make a choice

Children who are learning this skill:

- have opportunities to practise their listening and attention skills;
- learn/relearn new words and make associations between words and objects;
- have some control over what they do by influencing the experiences they engage in, thus reducing frustration and developing independence; and
- become more interactive and social partners with the people around them.



Providing opportunities to practice

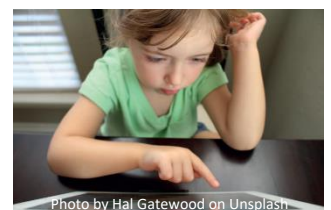
Consider the balance between routines and opportunities for choice making within this. Within adult-directed play versus child-initiated play, choice can easily be overlooked and so consideration and planning for choice-making opportunities needs to be built in.

“The details of a routine will vary from setting to setting as these depend on the uniqueness of each setting. In all cases, however, there is a need to balance two things. Firstly, regularity and predictability give security and a sense of safety. However, over-regimenting can have the opposite effect if children's choices get side-lined, or valuable activities are interrupted because ‘it is now time for ...’

We also have to be aware that children learn routines gradually and at their own pace. We have a role in showing children what to do, supporting and promoting choice, and in explaining what is happening. Some children may not have enough receptive language to cope with this, especially when under stress, so visual and sound prompts can be helpful.”

Realising the Ambition: Being Me

For some children with ASN, the acquisition of choice making skills needs structured support and lots of modelling and practice within familiar routines and environments. It is important therefore that you are familiar with the stage that the child is successfully working in. If you are unsure, you could use the expertise of the Speech and Language Therapist supporting the child or try **Charlotte Child's Choice Making Chart**. This can help you identify the level the child is at whilst still providing opportunities for challenge.



Choice making

Consider the learner's needs

If the child has a sensory impairment it is important that you are familiar with how best to present choices and what sense(s) to engage to make the experience meaningful, e.g. using objects of reference for choice making with a visually impaired child might be the most appropriate strategy.

“For learners with visual impairment, it is important to consider object size, positioning, and the learner’s ability to access it. Determine which visual, auditory or olfactory qualities make the object a useful means of communication for the learner. As learners become familiar with objects of reference indicating what is about to happen, they may begin to use them to communicate, for example to choose a drink.”

Quest for Learning; Guidance & Assessment Materials Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulties

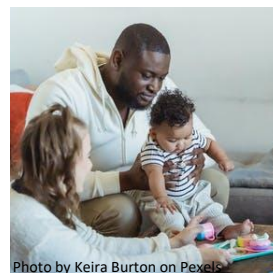
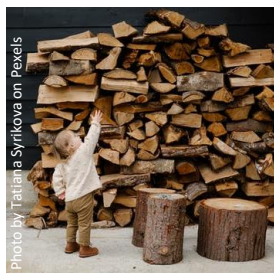
What choice making can look like

“Listen with your eyes. Know that my expressions and movements are a fundamental part of my ‘voice’. They articulate my confidence, creativity and curiosity.”

Realising the Ambition: Being Me

Choice making doesn’t have to be through words; look for all the different ways a child makes their choice known to you. These can be very subtle e.g. they might show their preference by giving more visual attention to something or show disinterest by looking away. Be mindful of these subtleties when working to develop this skill. It can be helpful to use video (with parental permission) to record interaction when offering choices. Review the clips and look out for:

- a change in facial expression perhaps indicating interest;
- looking or shifting their gaze and perhaps giving increased eye contact to one item/person/activity;
- a change in activity level e.g. increased/excited body movements, animated vocalisations, etc;
- more precise eye pointing;
- reaching for object or visual symbol;
- pointing to object or visual symbol; and
- sign or gesture or spoken word.



Additionally the Communication section of [Milestones: Supporting learners with complex additional support needs](#), outlines ways a child could show a preference or choice:

- Shows pleasure/displeasure through: Non-verbal or physical response/Verbal response.
- Accepts or rejects in response to sensory stimuli, objects, people and/or activities.
- Indicates preferences in response to sensory stimuli, objects, people and/or activities.
- Consistently shows and expresses preference to sensory stimuli, objects, people and/or activities.
- Communicates basic needs that enables them to be understood by others (for example, more/again/finished/enough/stop)
- Makes a choice using: Real objects/ Photos / Symbols.

Choice making

Strategies to support choice making

Offering a simple choice

- Initially present one item or activity only and offer a choice of “more” or “stop”.
- Allow time for the child to process the choice being offered.
- Reduce and simplify the language you use.
- Stress the key words as you make the offer.
- Show the object/visual symbol as you say the key word(s).

Make sure you match the presentation of choice to the child’s developmental stage e.g. offer the choice using objects/photos/visual symbols/choosing board, etc. whichever the child responds to best.



Moving on with choice making

- Create choices everywhere and make them realistic activities by building them into daily routines e.g. dressing, snack time, bedtime story, etc.
- Help to generalise choice making by practising the skill in different environments e.g. home, ELC, Granny’s house, play park, therapy room, etc.
- Offer from a choice of two objects. Make it easy initially, by offering a preferred object with a non-preferred one. Try changing the order you present them to the child, preferred first and non-preferred second. This can help to reduce the possibility of the child repeating the last word they hear and inadvertently choosing a non-preferred object.
- Move on to offer a choice from two equally motivating activities/toys.
- Gradually increase the number of options on offer.



Tips for supporting choice

- Model/demonstrate how choices can be made. It’s a good idea to model this with another supporting adult where one adult offers the choice and the other supports the child to make it.
- Use motivational toys/activities e.g. sensory, cause and effect, posting activities, etc. which match the developmental stage and interests of the child.
- Respond to whichever choice is made (even when you know it’s not what they actually want) as this may lead to better accuracy the next time you present the choice.
- Don’t let the child get frustrated with an inaccurate choice. Move on swiftly to re-presenting the choice and therefore giving them another chance to be more accurate.
- Only provide a choice when the child actually has a choice e.g. don’t say, “Would you like to tidy up?” when the expectation is that they have to tidy. It’s better to say, “Would you like to pick up your cars or blocks first?”



More links and information

- [This video](#) shows a lovely example of a choice being made by reaching.
- [Charlotte Child's Choice Making Chart](#) can be found in the Elklan Language Builders for Complex Needs.