

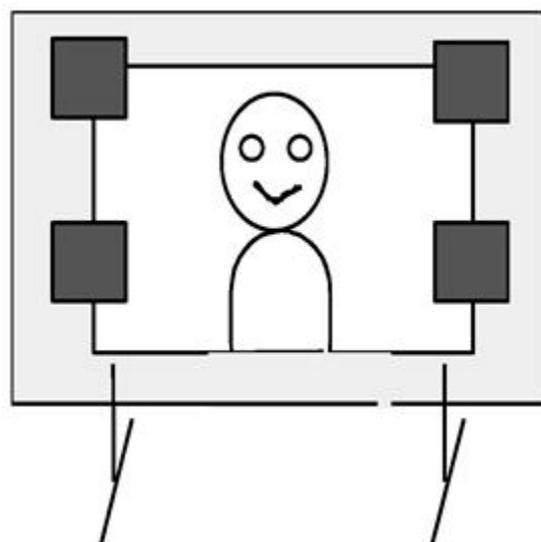
Eye Pointing and using an Etran Frame

Created: 11/00
Updated: 03/02
Author: NA

Some non-speaking children could use pictures and symbols as a means of communication except that they have hand function difficulties that make it hard for them to point to, reach or hold on to objects or pictures. They need a quicker and less physically demanding means of indication.

Some other children may not really have understood yet about indicating objects or pictures as a means of communication - but looking at interesting things placed in front of them is a natural response. They can gradually learn to make an association between what they look at, and interesting 'rewards' that happen (also involving their favourite people) as a result of their looking at certain items.

For both of these groups, **eye pointing** is, potentially, a simple and useful method of accessing a system of communication. An ETRAN frame can be used to introduce and use eye-pointing as a means of indication of pictures, and symbols (or letters, numbers, words) for communication. An ETRAN frame is more or less like an empty picture frame standing on a base. The frame is placed in front of the child, with meaningful pictures stuck around its edges, facing the child. There is a hole in the middle of the frame - and most frames are made of perspex or similar, so they are transparent anyway - so that the child's gaze is not restricted and s/he can look around freely. When the child looks at an object or picture on the frame, you, sitting opposite, can see where his/her eyes are going, and so you know which item he/she is indicating.



Positioning

The child should be sitting well at a table, with the frame square on, in front of them. Their partner should be directly opposite them, able to make eye contact through the hole in the centre of the frame.

If the base or feet are too low, raise the frame (e.g. stand it on books etc.)

Using the frame while moving about, lying down etc. is not really possible - although might become viable later on, once the child has understood and got used to how the frame works. If it is particularly important to have a frame that is to be used 'on the move' or in positions other than supported seating, it is worth thinking about getting/making a 'mini' ETRAN frame from lightweight perspex or clear plastic. (The wooden one or the full scale perspex ones are too heavy and cumbersome to be hand-held for more than a minute or two.)

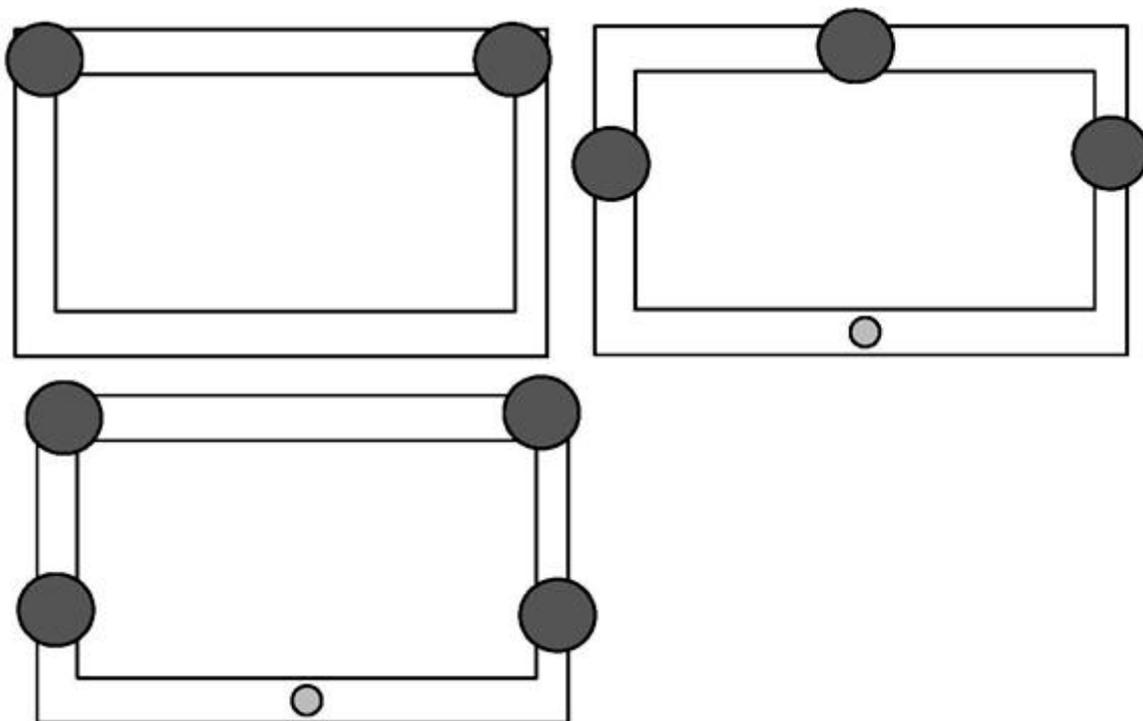
Make it Fun

The child needs to get the idea right from the start that this is a good game. Use highly motivating objects, food or small toys and stick these directly on to the frame, to start with, rather than pictures. Play games with these. For example, shopping (child is shop-keeper - you ask for the item, he has to indicate that item on his frame). Use real money, eat real biscuits! You can gradually mix in the odd picture later.

Attaching items to the Frame

Bluetack is really the simplest and best method.

If you stick picture symbol cards on, make sure that you write what they are on the back, so that **you** can see which is which! (you cannot both read their eye movements from the front **and** keep popping round to the child's side of the frame and 'sitting on his/her shoulder' to see what they are pointing at).



How many Objects/pictures?

Not too few (boring), not too many (overwhelming). Two, then quickly on to three is good. Move up gradually.

First steps

(Example only - replace biscuit with whatever object/game you choose, to suit the child)

Model the activity first so the child knows what they are supposed to do. Let the child see you sticking objects on the frame. Then turn it round so only you can see them. Make eye contact with the child, through the frame.

Pretend you are the shop keeper and ask "what would you like today then? I've got some nice things that you might like - would you like biscuits?"

Check the child is looking at you (full eye contact, if possible), then slowly move your gaze from the child's eyes up on to the biscuits on the frame. Look fixedly at the biscuit for a few seconds. Then say "I've found the biscuits, here you are" Then take the biscuit off the frame, give it to the child and let them eat a bit.

Repeat several times, with different objects/games.

Then stick the (same) objects on facing the child. Sit opposite, make eye contact, and say "MMM, I'm hungry, I'd like a biscuit please, can **you** show me where it is?"

Hopefully, they will then look at the object (it may be a very quick, fleeting glance). If so, say "Right, good, there it is, you showed me. You looked at this (point with your finger) It's the biscuit. Let's get the biscuit ". (take it down, eat etc.)

Prompting

If they don't look at the object but at another object, point with your finger at the object they did look at, and say "You showed me this. It's a cup. it's not a biscuit. Cup is for drinking. Shall we have a drink?" (Take the cup down and pretend to drink/give child pretend drink) . "Now, I want a biscuit, can you see the biscuit? You show me"

Scanning

If they still don't look at the biscuit, say, "Where's the biscuit, let's see. Let's look for the biscuit. You help me find it ."

Take your finger and slowly point to the item fixed in the position that is top left (to the child) (always start at this same position). Say "Is this it? No!" . Move your finger slowly and smoothly along to the next item along the top of the frame. Try to

'take the child's eyes with you' as you move your finger. "Is this it? No! . Keep doing this until you get to the biscuit. Then say "Aha, we've found it, look, look at the biscuit! here it is, good." Then take you finger away, make eye contact and ask "Where was it? you find the biscuit again, look at the biscuit!" and move your eyes very slowly to the position - trying to take the child's eye with your eyes as you move them.

Success

When they finally look at the biscuit, immediately put your finger on it and say "YES!! Good!! THERE it is! You found the biscuit. you showed me the biscuit. Great! Let's eat the biscuit!" (take it off and eat etc.)

For Advanced Users

Special Spot

From early on, you can stick a small item on the middle bottom of the frame (for example a round sticky label, coloured red or yellow). You won't use this at first (and it is a bit abstract for some children, so don't worry if it seems too complicated to ever introduce, for your user.)

Once the child has 'got the idea' and is looking consistently at things, you can introduce the spot. Instead of eye contact being the starting and finishing point, you should make eye contact with the child briefly at first, then encourage them to look down at the 'Special Spot', which means "I'm ready to start". Only then do you introduce the question/activity. The child will move their eyes and eye point as required.

The child should look also down at the Special Spot when they have finished, signalling that they are ready for another question. The Special Spot will also be the point to which the child's gaze should return if s/he or the listener 'get lost' and need to stop and start again. It is better to have at this point of reference, rather than just eye contact, because otherwise you never know when the child is just looking around, looking at an item to communicate/signal something specific, or looking at your eyes just to be in contact.

What can go wrong?

The biggest problem with eye-pointing is for the 'listening' partner rather than the child/message-sender; it is all a bit 'intangible' and can go very quickly, so it can be difficult to be sure that you have seen and read the child's eye movements accurately. Many children will look very quickly at the item than look away again, rather than fixing on the item for a long time. You HAVE TO pick this up and react appropriately to this, or they will not learn that eye-pointing is effective.

Do NOT make eye-pointing a boring 'task' ("Show me the boy", "look at the cow". (no, you didn't look at it properly, do it again!") Always make it conversational and fun (silly games and out and out bribery.)

Phone Sally at CALL for discussion, if you like, Tel: 0131 651 6077