



Project Core

Communicating Yes or No



Importance

The ability to answer yes/no questions is helpful in educational, medical and numerous other situations. A few common examples include the ability to:

- Accept or reject items. Do you want spinach?
- Indicate a positive or negative opinion. Do you like summer?
- Demonstrate understanding. Is this an elephant?
- Express critical information. Does your head hurt?

Communication partners typically direct the interaction by asking yes/no questions and students respond in a variety of ways.

For More Information

Contact the Project Core Team at project-core@unc.edu or visit www.project-core.com



Ways to express

There are many ways students can respond to yes/no questions. Conventional ways include nodding or shaking one's head, or gesturing with a thumb up or thumb down. Other less conventional, but often equally effective ways include verbal approximations or unique vocalizations, facial expressions like smiles and frowns, gazing up or down, turning a head, lifting a hand, or kicking a leg. Some students have a reliable way to say yes and the absence of that yes behavior indicates a no response. Aided approaches include pointing, scanning or eye gazing to yes or no symbols on an AAC system.

Benefits of unaided ways to respond

Unaided ways to express yes and no are beneficial because they are always available and do not require anything external to the student's body. Use of unaided approaches for yes and no also frees up space on aided AAC systems for beginning communicators for other important words.

Complexity of yes/no questions

While yes and no responses appear straightforward, they actually require relatively deep understanding of language. Contrast a simple yes/no question that asks a student if they want something with more complex yes/no questions that ask a student to share an opinion or demonstrate understanding on an academic topic. Many types of yes/no questions are difficult for beginning communicators to comprehend, and it is important to focus on building overall language understanding through demonstrating and teaching symbol use in addition to yes and no.

Universal Core vocabulary

We have intentionally not included yes and no on the Universal Core vocabulary. Instead, we encourage the identification, and consistent partner support, of unaided ways to communicate yes and no whenever possible. This decision is aimed at supporting the ability to respond to yes or no questions without requiring an aided AAC system, while maintaining a focus on using the Universal Core vocabulary to teach and demonstrate early symbolic language use.