The Yes/No Series - Part One

Ways to Indicate Yes and No

There are so many ways we all say yes and no every day. None of us is limited to just one means and our students should be either. In teaching our students a yes/no response we aim for the most universal - verbal and/or head nod/shake (at least in the USA, in English) but if those are not possible any other system is better than none at all. Here is a list of some I have seen used by people with significant special needs over the years:

- Verbal response (yes/no, ok/no, yeah/nah, si/no, uh ha/ut ah)
- Head Nod/Shake
- Body Language (smile/frown, look/look away,
  reach/push away)
- Pointing to symbols with
  - Finger
  - Hand
  - Foot
  - Head
  - Eyes
  - Other
- Activating a voice output switch

  - Finger
  - Hand
  - Foot
  - Head
  - Eyes
  - Other
- Activating a speech device
- Yes/no wrist bands – raise hand or look at hand

- Yes/no symbols on arm rest with hand movement or eye gaze to symbols
- Sign yes/no (or sign approximations)
- Eyes up for yes, eyes down for no (and vice versa)
- Eyes left for yes, eyes right for no (and vice versa)
- Facial expressions – smile for yes, frown for no
- Thumbs up/thumbs down
- Look at partner for yes/look away for no
- Yes/no cards
- Yes/no wearable tag/necklace
- Hold up fist for yes/open hand for no
- Tongue click for yes, none for no
- Eye brows up for yes/down for no (vice versa)
- Lip raise for yes (smile) and nose wrinkle for no (sour face)
- Point to chin for yes and nose for no
- Clap for yes, tap tray for no
- There's an app for that

Or any combination of a yes and a no from above!

2 comments:

Reply

1.

*Unknown*December 17, 2012 at 9:23:00 AM EST

Hi Kate,
Really nice resource, as ususual.
I do have an exception to the color semantics choice for yes/no though. Consider the 2-switch scanner where "No, not than one," means continue, or go on scanning. And, "Yes, I want that one," means stop scanning and pick that item.

Also, I have often considered, perhaps wrongly, that concepts like "I want," or "I like," and "I don't want," or "I don't like'" are often easier for students to grasp than a simple yes, or no. I will often combine the two for example as "Yes, I want that," or "No, I don't want that."

The Yes/No Series – Part Two

There is so much more in the world to say than yes/no, yet it is still a vital skill, especially in fast moving situations and medical situations. We times see goals on IEPs for learners with severe special needs about yes/no and I will be the first to admit I have done this poorly in the past. Like many people I had a tendency to believe that if we just practiced enough we would eventually successfully teach yes/no. Thus many of my students sat through daily "drill" in which they were asked ten yes or no questions and were given positive reinforcement or rewards when they were correct. Not surprisingly this wasn't effective for many of them.

First we must understand not all yes/no questions are created equally. "Do you want a cookie?" is far from "Was Washington the third president?". Think about "Do you want to go home?" versus "You do want to go home, don't you?" All of these questions are yes/no questions. Anyone of these could be tossed out in a yes/no drill. Yet they presume different cognitive and language skills and different types of motivation.

Some of the different types of yes/no are:
- **Accept/reject** "Do you want your blanket?"
    - o Choice "How about the blue one?"
- **Affirm/deny**
    - o Possession "Is this your coat?"
    - o Preference "Do you like the red one?"
    - o Label "Is this a table?"
    - o Function of objects "Does a vacuum walk?"
    - o Test knowledge "Is it facing north?"
    - o Comparison "Is a dog older than a puppy?"
    - o Relative time "Did that happen first?"
    - o Preference "Do you like apples?"
- **Rhetorical question** "How 'bout them apples?"

For our learners we start by focusing on accept/reject. We need to avoid the other kinds of yes/no until we are sure that the student understands that yes is accept and no is reject. Then we will work on different types of yes/no questions.

One way to work yes/no is accept/reject this is by offering choices in the following manner:
- teacher: "Do you want milk or no?"
- student: eyegazes to milk
- teacher: "yes, you want milk." while modeling the students yes response, whatever that is

Another example:
- teacher: "Would you like the purple one or no?"
- student: pushes away the purple one
- teacher "No, you do no want the purple one!" again, while modeling the way the student would show this

We must be careful in doing this type of accept/reject question that we do not assume that we know what the child wants. A child might love soda, so you ask, "Do you want soda?" and the child communicates "no". A "no" is a "no". Perhaps the child already had plenty of soda, or perhaps he or she has a sore throat, or perhaps his parent told him "don't you have soda today!". Or maybe the child doesn't yet understand yes/no.

If that is the case, modeling that NO means you rejected the thing that was offered by taking away/not giving soda is essential. If the student becomes upset because they wanted soda you can wait a minute and offer again, "Do you want soda? Yes." This time you answer your own question both verbally and by modeling the yes response. This gives a cue to the child that the answer is yes. You already established that they want the soda (the complaining when you took it away after they said no) so you can teach the yes response by modeling it.

Another thing to be careful of is the tendency for adults to use their words just to fill space. How often do you hear, "Yes or no? Do you want the ball? Yes or no? The ball? Tell me yes or no?" Imagine how confusing that is if the child doesn't understand the concept of yes and no. Imagine how confusing it is if the child has language processing issues and that is just too many words. So many of our students just choose whatever comes last and this is one of the ways we unintentionally teach them to do that. We teach them that if they wait for us to pause and repeat whatever the last thing we said/did was, they will be rewarded. Sometimes our students will even answer with "yes or no," or even by parroting "tell me yes or no." A key to teaching anything is wait time. And a key to teaching yes/no is refraining from using the phrase, "Tell me yes or no."

Another important part of teaching this type of yes/no is by having all those in the environment model it; aides, parents, peers. We should model it verbally and in the same means that our student should express it. The more we explicitly show how yes/no works, the faster our student will learn.


The Yes/No Series - Part 3

Sing It!

One of the coolest things I saw at Linda Burkhart's and Gayle Porter's workshop at the ISAAC conference was the Yes Song and No Song Gayle's school uses to teach yes and no. As far as I can find the song isn't available anywhere on the internet. However some other songs are. Another option is to work with your music teacher or music therapist to create a song. This might be especially vital if you work with students over preschool as the selection of songs below is not age appropriate. (With the exception of the Beatles!)

It is vital to model the way you want your students to communicate yes and no throughout the songs. Perhaps a turn for each child with specific modeling of their way of communicating yes and no.

The Yes/No Series - Part Four
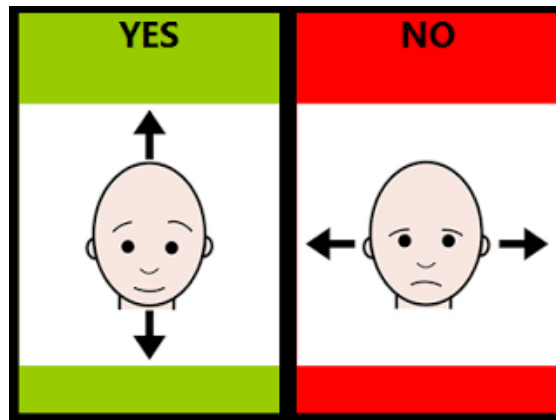
Using Games to Teach/Reinforce Yes/No
*"In ev'ry job that must be done
There is an element of fun
You find the fun and snap!
The job's a game" - Mary Poppins*

"Is that right?" Game
Level: yes/no for accept/reject and higher

This game is all about being silly! You can play it to work on accept/reject yes/no responses or something at a higher level. Essentially you do something super silly, like try to put on the child's coat yourself, put the child's sock on their hand or whatever the child will know is absurd. Then you ask, "Do you want it this way?" or "Do you like it this way?". Keep in mind that the child may, indeed, want it that way, because being silly is fun. So if he says "yes" to the sock on his hand, keep it up and put the other sock on his other hand. Create a build up and keep asking yes or no questions. When it is time to stop, if the answer is still, "yes", then you say, "Oh, I am so silly! No (model how the child says no)! It doesn't go like this!" If the child is working on higher-level yes/no you can ask, "Do socks go on hands?" and other higher order questions.

The Yes/No Race
Level: higher yes/no skills (label, function of object, comparison, etc.)

Prepare a list of yes/no questions at the level your students are working on or use yes/no question cards (see list below). Decide if the student will compete individually or in teams. Create a scoreboard with student names or team names. Be sure each child has access to their best way of expression yes/no. Using your list or cards, ask each question one by one. After each question be sure to wait up to a minute. You can either play that the first correct answer wins a point or every correct answer wins a point. I find this game works better if you have everyone answer at once (thus none of the students refuses to answer just for the attention given when they don't). Whoever has the most points at the end wins a prize!

Guess Who?
Level: higher yes/no

You can play this with the commercial game, with the commercial game replacing the cards with your own or you can create your own game. To create your own you need to print out two sets of photographs of people (can be real people in your setting, celebrities or characters of books, etc). We like to make these large for our students with Low Vision. Using a velcro board or similar hang up one set of pictures. Choose a student to be "it", preferably one who is working on yes/no. Allow that child to pick a person from the second set of photo cards. Once chosen the other players ask yes/no questions and the child who is "it" answers. Be sure to have that child's best way of saying yes/no available. If the children asking the questions are non-speaking they can use communication books or devices or you can even program a series of questions onto a sequential switch such as a Step-by-Step or Smooth Talker. The "asking" children should use the means of asking that allows them the most possible independent generation of their questions. Once a yes/no question is asked and answered cards are removed from the velcro display board of photos in the process of elimination. Stop when someone guesses the person or only one person is left. Whoever guess is it, if no one guessed then the teacher picks. (Thanks to Susan Malloy, SLP for this idea.)

What is it? Game
Level: higher yes/no

Gather a set of object or pictures. These can be related to the theme unit you are teaching (insects, planets or common objects from around the room). Choose a child to be "it' and take him or her into the hall (or aside) and all the child to choose one thing. Go back to the group and display all the items or pictures, including the chosen one. The child who is "it" will need his or her best way to answer yes/no. The other children will need a means to ask questions that eliminate items from the array in front of them. As always speech or AAC can be used for the answering and the asking. You may need to have questions for your particular set of objects ready on communication devices/boards/switches ahead of time. As questions are asked and answered eliminate choices until someone guess correctly or one one choice is left. You can also play this with the commercial game Hed Banz, adapt the game by only having one person at a time where a Hed Banz and the others take turns answering yes/no questions of the wearer.


20Q Game
Level: Higher yes/no

20Q is a commercial game available as a handheld electronic game, an app or online (for free). For our purposes an older version of the handheld game (yard sales, flea markets, your basement) is better, but you can adapt if needed to the newer version. 20Q operates just like the 20 Questions game most of us have played, only the game does all the figuring out. The old version asks questions and gives you three possible responses: "yes", "no, "it depends". The newer version has up to ten possible answers, "yes", "no", "it depends", "unknown", "irrelevant", "sometimes", "maybe", "probably", "rarely", "partly". Personally, I think that the new 20Q cheats! However you can still use it by only answering "yes", "no"

and "it depends". If your students aren't ready for "it depends" you can ask them yes or no and change it to "it depends" when you enter the answer into the game. You can also rephrase questions like "Is it an abstract concept?" or just answer those yourself without reading them aloud. So long as all the students have a means of communication "yes" and "no" this game is a fun way to practice.

Question of the Day
Level: any

This is a fun game to include in your morning meeting group. You can use a portable white board and simply write the question with a drawing and two columns or you can make your Question of the Day board all fancy. If your students are at the accept/reject level of yes/no you can make a list of 10-15 accept reject questions and cycle through them over and over. These could be things like, "Do you want the teacher to sing really loud?", "Do you want a high five?", "Do you want the paraprofessional to spin in circle ten times?", "Do you want my to give you a 3 second shoulder rub?" Then go around the room and ask each child and perform the action if he or she says yes. Tally each child (or put a picture of each child) under yes or no on your display. Overtime you can draw comparisons, "Last time 2 students wanted me to sing, how many this time?" then you can bring in counting if you would like. If your students are a higher level you can ask more abstract questions, "Are you wearing boots?" or "Is a fish an insect?" and then tally and graph responses.
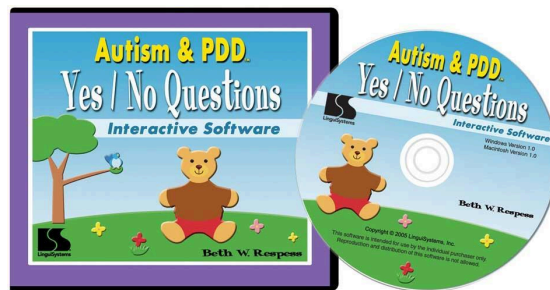
Yes/No Practice Apps and Software
(CVUSD note: please note that some of these links may no longer be active; they were provided by Kate Ahern when she originally wrote the article)

- Ask Me a Yes/No Question by Super Duper for iPad and Android
- Autism and PDD Yes/No Questions App by Linguisystems
- Autism and PDD Yes/No Questions Software by Linguisystems

Yes/No Question Lists and Cards
Free

- Speaking of Speech Auditory Processing Cards
- SLP Materials Power Point
- SLP Materials Categories Yes/No Questions
- Yes/No Cards on Boardmaker Share (must have Boardmaker)
- Yes/No Question Cards from Twinkl
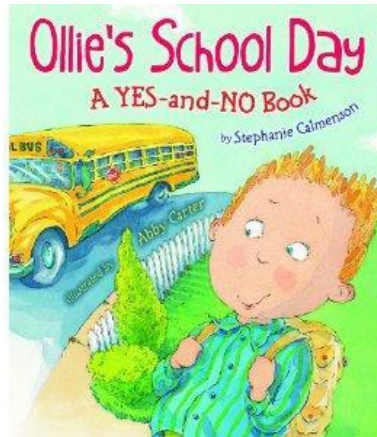- Yes/No Question Cards from Sparklebox
- Yes/No Monsters

Commercial

- K-3 Teacher Resources (requires premium membership)
- Yes or No Fun Deck by Super Duper
- Smart Kids Yes/No Questions

- [PECS 4 Autism Yes/No](#)
- [Just for Adults Yes/No Questions by Linguisystems](#)

The Yes/No Series - Part Five

Using Books to Teach and Reinforce Yes/No

- [Ollie's School Day: A Yes and No Book](#)
  - o   Go with Ollie through his day making yes and no choices
- [No No Yes Yes](#)
  - o   this board book presents behaviors and labels them yes and no
- [I'm Going to Read: No Yes](#)
  - o   this is a simple story told by a series of yes and no statements
- [Yes, No, Maybe So](#)
  - o   another simple story about reinforcing positive behavior
- [No, David!](#)
  - o   this Kindergarten favorite has the adults in David's life telling him, "No!" to all of the impulsive things he does and is a great way to get all the kids calling out "NO!" whatever way they happen to do that!
- [Yes No Little Hippo](#)
  - o   a book about safety through yes and no
- Yes [Day](#)
  - o   the best day of the year, when every question is answered with "Yes!"
- [Eli, No!](#)
  - o   a simple story about unconditional love told through a dog who gets into trouble
- [Yes Yes Yaul!](#)
  - o   Yaul only like to say, "No!" until his friends help him learn to try "Yes!"
- [Stop and Go, Yes and No](#)
  - o   this is a book about opposites and is best suited for teaching core words/antonyms, but it does contain yes and no
- [Yes, Please! No, Thank you!](#)
  - o   a book of silly questions

- [No & Yes](#)
  - o   a rhyming toddler book about behavior
- [Oh No, Ah Yes](#)
  - o   a book about trying new things

Ways to use these and other books to teach and reinforce yes/no:

- as you read the book have paraprofessionals and peers model yes and no for each student in the manner he or she communicates it
- pick a student to be your co-reader and communicate yes and no as they occur in the book
- velcro yes/no symbols to the pages and having students placing them correctly
- have the students shout out (using whatever the method they use) yes and no
- for behavior oriented books print pictures of each behavior and having students sort into yes and no

The Yes/No Series - Part Six

"Best Yes" and Rewarding Successive Approximation

Shaping, simply put, is rewarding the small steps that lead to a large success. Also known as "rewarding successive approximations" I call it, "Close enough is good enough, for now." By which I mean that if we reward a first step towards meeting a goal and then each tiny step closer we will eventually get there. Shaping is baby steps. In the case of yes/no this starts with something known as "best yes".

A "best yes" is any response our student with complex communication needs gives us that indicates affirmation. A slight head movement, a smile, clapping hands, stopping a rocking motion or a change in affect any of these is a best yes - and it is ok, at first, to accept any one of these from the same child.

With careful observation (including video, if needed) and data collection we can determine which "best yes" we can shape into a consistent "yes" response. We want our vision of the consistent "yes" to be something noticeable and clearly understandable by all who interact with the individual regularly.

For some children we may need to accept that the "best yes" and "close enough is good enough" is how things will be for a while and reaching a consistent yes might take years and years. We may wonder or have to respond to others wondering if the "best yes" we are accepting is "intentional" on the part of the child. The thing about a "best yes" is that intention is irrelevant. We teach intentionality by assuming intentionality. Repeat it with me, "We teach intentionality by assuming intentionality." We are not delusional or Pollyannas when we act like that slight and inconsistent response is a "yes" - we are teaching! Make a banner and hang it across your classroom if you must, "We teach intentionality by assuming intentionality!" When we reward that "best yes" we teach the child that repeating that "best yes" will lead to a reward. We teach intentionality by assuming intentionality.

Watch this clip from the 1970 French film, <u>An Infinite Tenderness</u>, look for all the "best yes" responses and how the same child uses different "best yes" answers. (The story is a puppy love story between these two children, the boy on the left and the girl on the right, it is told completely without words. You can watch it on Netflix. It is amazing.)

By combining our observed "best yes" and our vision for a consistent "yes" we can create a plan in which we reward the "best yes" we want to shape until it is consistent. This means offering highly motivating rewards and waiting for the "best yes" before giving the reward.

Once the "best yes" is consistent we up the ante. We model the next successive approximation, offer a highly motivating reward and give the reward when the child gives us the new and improved, consistent "yes". This might mean we initially give the reward for a slight drop of the chin (working towards a nod) and once that is consistent we give the reward for a deeper drop of the chin. Then we repeat with the next approximation until we have achieved our vision of a consistent, noticeable and understandable "yes". (Which might mean the next approximation is a deeper chin drop and then a slight lift of the head and then a deep chin drop and a full lift of the head.) We may have to have different expectations at different times - a slight smile is ok after a severe seizure or surgery but on a good day we expect a smile and a nod.

Shaping must be used with all of the other teaching tools in our tool boxes. With students who have severe, complex or multiple needs one method is usually not enough for success!

{As an aside it is obviously best for the end result to be universally understood like a spoken response (yes/no yup/nah, ok/nope), a head gesture (nod/shake) or hand motion (thumbs up/thumbs down). If this is not possible something slightly less universal but common with individuals with disabilities is a good choice such as signing yes/no, looking up for yes/down for no or blink once for yes/twice for no. However a creative yes/no is better than a lifetime of trying to force someone to speak or nod/shake when it is too difficult.}