

Development of Switch Skills



1. Awareness of the Computer Screen / Toy / Object and Tracking with Eyes

This earliest stage of development is concerned with the person being aware of the screen and able to follow movement on it with their eyes. Without this awareness, it is very difficult for the person to develop a cause and effect relationship.

2. Awareness that a Switch can be Pressed

The person is not yet aware of the cause-and-effect relationship. At this stage, the person is exploring the switch and working on how they can physically access it. Hitting the switch may start off as an accidental press. The position of the person in relation to the placement of the switch is extremely important in this stage. Various types of switches should also be trialled.

3. Understanding of the Cause-and-Effect Relationship of Switch Presses

This stage involves the person developing an awareness of the relationship between their switch presses and the resulting reward. Some people grasp this immediately, while others require a lot of practice with a wide variety of activities. Activities can include "Cause and Effect" software, switch operated toys, or toys with adaptor leads, or battery interrupters, and mains control and timer units, such as 'Powerlink'.



This is an example of a battery-operated toy that has been adapted for switch use

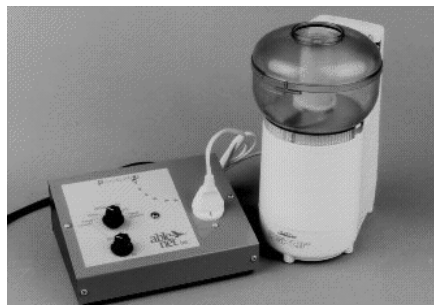
If a person is going to be able to press the Switch and See and enjoy the reward, careful positioning of the monitor, the person and the switch is necessary. Consistent verbal and physical prompts at this early stage offer encouragement.

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However, the aim is to get the person to interact with the device; as their control develops, external prompts should be reduced.

4. Exploration and Understanding of Various Switch Modes

The Powerlink and some computer-based switch accessible games allow you to choose a switch mode that you would like to practise. Below is a summary of various switch modes:



a) Holding – need to hold switch down continuously to get a response on the screen. This limits those who are unable to hold switch down continuously.

b) Latching – one press to start and one to stop the action on the screen. This encourages the skill of being able to press and release the switch at will. In this way, the user could control the music for a game of musical statues.

c) Timed Responses – briefly pressing the switch activates the device for a pre-set amount of time. At the end of the pre-set amount of time, the timer turns the device off and the person has to reactivate it by pressing the switch again. This is helpful for people who need time to look up to the computer screen or object after pressing the switch. This also encourages the understanding that brief presses are needed to make something happen. For example, a person could take part in a cooking class by operating the blender in this way.

5. Switch Timing

The person needs to understand that there is an appropriate time to press the switch. This is a very big step in switch operation. It requires motor and cognitive skills to operate the switch and an understanding of the task. Lots of software packages provide excellent ways of helping children to wait for the correct time to press their switch.

6. Choosing with Switches

This stage involves choice making, allowing the selection of desired items. This involves a scanning process controlled by one or two switches. Development of this skill provides many opportunities for switch users to access a much wider range of curriculum material. This requires good skills in visual scanning. Programs that allow the scanning speed to be adjusted are most appropriate; as they enable the user to develop scanning skills at their own pace.

7. Turn Taking

This provides the child with the chance to play games with another person.

Important Points to Remember:

- Ample time and regular practice is required for a child to become a proficient switch user.
- Before moving on to more complex tasks, give the child time to develop their switch skills to a point where they become reasonably automatic, so that they are able to concentrate their thoughts and efforts on the results of their presses and not on their switching.

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