**Tip of the Month – November 2014 – Switching**

Cause & effect is an important first step in the development of switching skills for people with complex physical disabilities that prevent them from being able to directly touch a computer or communication device. However one of the challenges with working at the level of cause & effect for someone who requires AAC, is ensuring you have a wide range of different activities in order to maintain the learner's interest and motivation. The other challenge is juggling the demands of the physical, cognitive and motor aspects of the task (Porter & Burkhart, 2012).

Below are some ideas of how to make cause & effect more communicative, and when to move on from cause & effect. Please note, that with relation to this tip of the month, we are referring to use of a single switch, but you may be experimenting with multiple switch locations (e.g. hand, head, foot etc.).

**How to make cause & effect switching more communicative**

- Use a single or sequential message device (such as a Big Mack or Step by Step) to speak a repeated line in a story book/play/song etc.
- Use a sequential message device to go on a "Hi walk" around school/the neighbourhood and greet people in different ways
- Use a message device to give instructions in a game (e.g. Simon says) or direct others
- Control a switch adapted toy. You can get really creative with toys – don't just use them for their intended purpose, think outside the box e.g. build a tower and get the switch toy to knock it down

Most importantly, make sure you mix things up because we don't want to run the risk of the learner becoming bored with the activity. They don't need to master it 100% before you introduce a new activity.

**When to move on from cause & effect**

There is no strict hierarchy here. Learners can be working at more than one level of the switch progression pathway at any given time. However it's a good idea to move on from cause & effect, single switch activation when you observe any/all of the following:

- The learner is becoming bored with the activity
- They demonstrate an understanding (and remember it doesn't have to be 100% consistent) that switches have a range of functions
- Where you have identified at least two viable switch location sites (in order to begin introducing 2-switch use)

References:

Porter, G. & Burkhart, L. (2012). *The juggling act: Developing switch access, language and communication skills in parallel.* Inclusive Learning Technologies Conference. Gold Coast: Australia.