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TD Snap Aphasia: Photographs to Support Communication

A picture is worth a thousand words.

When we use photographs to share memories, thoughts, and ideas, they enrich our interactions and keep the listener and the speaker more focused on the topic at hand.

Photographs create a shared space for conversations to happen. For people with aphasia, photographs are a valuable tool to aid both expression and comprehension. They can be used in therapy, home practice, and conversation.

When photographs are used in this way to support communication, they are called visual scenes.

Context matters.

To create a great visual scene, research tells us the more 'context-rich' a photo is, the better. What does context-rich mean? How do you select a context-rich picture to personalise a visual scene?

Context-rich images are photographs or drawings depicting people or objects interacting in natural environments. In addition to information about location, these images convey content about the situation, activity, experience, and relationships (Wallace et al 2014).

In this photo, we see a clear activity in context. This photo also can generate emotion. When looking at this image, you may remember enjoyable times making pasta with your family.

5 Tips for Selecting Context-rich Photos

1. **Aim for action.**
   A photo of the family in the process of making pasta provides more context than a picture of just pasta. Likewise, a posed portrait of the family near the pasta would have less action and emotion, making it less effective as a conversation support.

2. **Select photos with a specific theme**.
   Photos should include a variety of components that make the theme clear. For example, if you want to represent gardening, choose a photo of someone using gardening tools in a real garden.

This photo shows people actively involved in an activity. We can also see one person's facial expression easily.

3. **Look for real facial expressions**.
   Select pictures that have at least one person facing the camera. This helps set the emotional tone of the image.

4. **Personalise it.**
Choose topics and photos meaningful to the person with aphasia. Then decide what personal phrases to pair with the picture. The buttons located around the image in the Visual Scene Display should be personalised with messages about the image's context. For someone who loves gardening, the phrase "So many weeds!" could be added to support the scene.

5. **Pay attention to backgrounds.**
Ensure the background of the photograph adds to the context and does not distract from the action.

In this photo, capturing the Christmas tree in the background would have provided more context to make the event clearer.

Locating Visual Scene Displays within TD Snap Aphasia

In the TD Snap Aphasia software, visual scenes are found on the toolbar under "Topics – Visual Scene." Selecting this option opens a page of various topics. Each topic provides a photograph relevant to the topic as well as surrounding phrases. The photos and phrases can be customised with personal content when desired. We highly suggest personalising these images and phrases to allow the person with aphasia to participate more meaningfully in conversations that matter to them.

Research:

Wallace, S. E., Hux, K., Brown, J., & Knollman-Porter, K. (2014). High-context images: Comprehension of main, background, and inferential information by people with aphasia. Aphasiology, 28, 713-730, DOI: 10.1080/02687038.2014.891095

Dietz, McKelvey, Beukelman, Weissling, & Hux (2005). Visual scenes display: A new AAC interface for persons with severe, chronic aphasia. Presentation at the annual convention of ASHA, San Diego, CA.

Dietz, A., McKelvey, M., & Beukelman, D. (2006). Visual scene display: New AAC interface for persons with aphasia. Perspectives on Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 15, 13–17.