

# **CAN WE CHAT?**

## **CO-PLANNED SEQUENCED SOCIAL SCRIPTS**

### **WHAT ARE SOCIAL SCRIPTS?**

Social Scripts are interactions such as joke-telling, sharing life stories and general conversations. They help persons using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) move beyond wants and needs to using 'real' communication for conversational purposes. They support students in learning to claim, start, and maintain turns in a conversation. This booklet primarily provides ideas for beginning communicators.

### **WHY SOCIAL SCRIPTS?**

Research compiled by Arlene Kraat in 1985 indicated a number of problem areas in the growing area of AAC. These have been verified by other researchers and authors:

- \* Communication displays / devices rarely used
- \* AAC users typically respondents, not initiators (Culp, 1982; Harris, 1982; Light, et al, 1985)
- \* Limited range of functions available to AAC users
- \* Interaction patterns that focus on closed-answer questions (What do you want?) and "testing" (What's this?)
- \* Expectations for AAC users are minimal
- \* Conversational partners control interactions, with turntaking highly unequal (Farrier et al, 1985; Light et al., 1985)
- \* Peer interaction is minimal

Culp & Carlisle (1988) suggested that many factors can contribute to the difficulty shown by augmented communicators in initiating and maintaining topics. She suggested the following: vocabulary constraints, rate and timing of message delivery, physical effort required, limited environmental experiences, and partner behaviors (e.g., failure to pause).

Well, it's the new millennium . . . and most of those problems are still with us. We must use a variety of strategies to ensure that augmented communicators - even those with limited access skills, can achieve interactions that are:

frequent  
 motivating  
 self-initiated  
 varied, to maintain interest  
 ongoing, with multiple turns  
 w/ a range of partners, including peers  
 a way to model a range of pragmatics  
 low maintenance (do them "on the fly")

One strategy to address these needs is to develop age-appropriate, motivating Social Scripts that may be easily accessed, even by beginning communicators. These social scripts should fulfill several areas of the agendas or social purposes described by Janice Light (1988).

## LEVELS OF SOCIAL SCRIPTS

At present, we are identifying three levels of social scripts. These levels may be used by a range of AAC users, and are not strictly tied to a user's accessing, language, or cognitive skills.

<b>Level of Script</b>	<b>Features</b>	<b>Purposes</b>
<i>Co-Planned Sequenced</i>	Sequence of pre-programmed 'turns' Constructed by partner or co-constructed by partner & user	Practice accessing Increased motivation 'Feel' for conversation
<i>Structured with Choice</i>	Pre-programmed language - sequence chosen by user; typically includes multiple options (e.g., several ways to initiate, maintain)	Provide maximum support for conversation; Present all needed conversation parts at 1 time
<i>Generative</i>	User has a wide range of options to choose from, quick talk, & typically includes alphabet	Engage in real conversation, near equal turns

## WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM CO-PLANNED SEQUENCED SCRIPTS?

Social scripts can support users with a range of physical, language, and cognitive challenges.

- **Individuals with Poor Access Skills:** Often, individuals with poor access skills are limited in their social interactions, as they are unable or extremely slow to use devices to take conversational turns. Using social scripts with easily accessed devices can give these students a 'feel' for the give and take of conversational turntaking.

• **Individuals with Limited Expressive Language Skills:** The umbrella term "limited language skills" can cover a range of issues. As used here, it specifically refers to individuals whose receptive language is greater than their expressive language. This may be due to a number of factors, including access to limited vocabulary. Limited vocabulary, in turn, may have many causes, from limited experiences and opportunities to restricted vocabulary due to the lack of generative language and the difficulty storing (or remembering the location of) all needed vocabulary.

• **Individuals with Cognitive Delay:** To some, use of sequenced social scripts may seem question-able for students with cognitive delay, as that may create a receptive-expressive mismatch (what the student is saying is at a higher cognitive level than their receptive level). We have found that this is not as great a concern as we initially thought, for two reasons: 1) Often, when given an opportunity to communicate for 'real' purposes, in socially engaging ways, we find that students have higher receptive language levels than previously guessed; 2) Motivation can cause individuals to 'turn on' to communication, where basic wants and needs (eat, drink, toilet!) were unsuccessful.

## SCRIPT CATEGORIES

For ease of choosing scripts, these categories might be helpful. You may choose different categories, but here is a starter set:

• **Action Scripts:** These scripts are especially appropriate for beginners, who are cognitively or chronologically young. They engage the partner in action, and the student receives tangible results from communicative attempts. Samples are: Bookreading, Backrub, and Putting On Lotion.

• **Class / Work Participation Scripts:** Students spend much of their day engaged in class activities that may offer limited opportunities for interactive communication. These scripts offer an opportunity to maximize classroom activities such as studying for a test or engaging in a cooperative activity. Younger students might use scripts to be song leader, story leader, or transition leader. Older students and adults might use work participation scripts, such as "Applying Labels."

• **Conversation Scripts:** Conversation scripts engage partners in interactive conversation, and can include all of the social agendas listed below. For example, pranks can show humor, "Before the Ball Game" develops a sense of belonging, and "This Weekend" promotes information transfer.

## SOCIAL AGENDAS & SCRIPT IDEAS

### SOCIAL CLOSENESS

- 1) **Sense of Belonging:** These include scripts about trivia, gossip, and general "hanging out":
  - a) Talking about common interests (sports, collections such as Pokemon)
  - b) Scripts that are similar to those used by same-age peers such as "Who's Cute?" or "What Are You Wearing Tomorrow?"
  
- 2) **Aspects of Personality:** Aspects of personality to be highlighted include humor, teasing, flirting, whining, etc. Potential Scripts are:
  - a) Those that show humor, such as joke scripts or humorous poems
  - b) Those that show exasperation, such as "Can I Come Out Now" (a follow-up to the parent's "Go To Your Room" script)
  - c) "Pranks" can also be included in this category, such as "fake vomit" or switch activated

"fart machines

3) **Change Perceptions:** All of the social scripts fall into this category, as they help communication partners recognize that AAC users can initiate, claim turns, and maintain a topic of joint interest

## **INFORMATION TRANSFER**

1) **Social scripts** such as “Guess What Happened!” can present new information, while also including many of the features of the social closeness agendas

2) **Content-Area Scripts** can also support information transfer, with the student serving to share information for the teacher. Samples are:

a) Spelling Test (remember to introduce with social language and intersperse with comments)

b) Directions (for an art project, science experiment, etc.) should also include features such as: attention-grabbers (Today we’re going to . . . .) and maintainers (are you ready?)

# Script Builder

## SCRIPT:

**Student's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Person's Building Script:

\_\_\_ Student            \_\_\_ Parent  
\_\_\_ teacher           \_\_\_ peer  
\_\_\_ therapist        \_\_\_ other (specify)

### Type of Script:

\_\_\_ action    \_\_\_ class work/participation    \_\_\_ conversation

Specify purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Communication  
Function

Sample Message

Attention Getter(s)

Starter

Maintainers and  
Turn Transfers

Closing

## Does This Script:

\_\_\_ start with a greeting, "excuse me", or other hook to get the partner's attention?

\_\_\_ include a range of communicative functions (positive comment, negative comment, teasing, questioning, directing, etc.)?

\_\_\_ provide for multiple turns (ex:; topic maintainers such as "tell me more" or "wanna hear the rest")?

\_\_\_ ensure that the user doesn't get "backed into a corner" (unexpected response stops exchange?)

\_\_\_ Use "real-kid language" appropriate for the student's age and setting?

\_\_\_ Use "person-matched language" appropriate to the personality

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### Type of Script:

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Specify purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Communication  
Function

Sample Message

Attention Getter(s)

Hey!

Starter

Let's sing a song.  
Can I pick?

Maintainers and  
Turn Transfers

Here's the one I want.  
Cool.  
Okay, let's sing another – I can choose.  
I like that.  
Can we sing one more?  
You can pick it.

Closing

Nice!  
Well, that's it for now.  
Guess what?  
You might not want to quit the day job!