**Using “Touch Cues” with Children with Complex Care & Communication Needs**

**What is a touch cue?**

A light touch provided consistently on a specific place on the body in order to give concrete information about an event or action that is about to happen.

*For example, use a light touch on the hip prior to changing/toileting routine, or a light touch on the shoulder and side prior to turning his/her on his/her side to reposition.*

**Why use touch cues with a child who has limited expressive communication?**

* Provide concrete and consistent information about what is happening/going to happen
* Reduce stress in interactions and transitions: *For example, a nurse may use a light touch on the forearm before changing an IV*
* Support the development of early communication and symbolism

**Tips for using touch cues:**

* Pair touch cues with language – *continue to speak to the child, for example, at the same time as touching the child’s forearm, say, “I’m going to change your IV.”*
* Allow for extra processing time (“wait time”) when using touch cues. *For example, hold the touch on the forearm for 5 seconds to allow the child to process what will happen next.*

**Create an *inventory* of touch cues for a child, which can be consistently used by everyone who interacts with that child. Choose events or actions/interactions that happen frequently and the child may have difficulty anticipating otherwise. Start with between 5-10 touch cues.**

**For example**

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| **Action/Event** | **Touch Cue** | **Comments** |
| Hello/greeting | Light touch on shoulder | Allow 5 seconds wait time, pair with verbal greeting |
| Changing/toileting | Light touch on hip/side | Allow 5 seconds wait time, pair with “Time to change your diaper” |
| IV-related action | Light touch on forearm | Allow 5 seconds wait time, pair with “I’m going to change/etc. your IV now…” |
| Taking hands to show an object/sensory toy | Light touch on back of hand | Allow 5 seconds wait time, pair with “I’m going to take your hand to show you something…” |
| Using massager/sensory item  | Light touch on place on body where you will place the sensory item before direct contact with the item itself | Allow 5 seconds wait time, pair with language briefly stating what will happen |

To learn more about touch cues, see : ([Belote, 2009](http://www.cadbs.org/news/a03-touch-cues/)); ([Bruce, 2014](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/SPED/e9a4552e-ad48-4c26-9f6c-7fa9cd50d362/UploadedImages/May2014SevereMontlyMessageTouchCues.pdf)); ([Zangari, 2019](https://praacticalaac.org/praactical/beginning-communicators-learning-through-touch-cues/))

Touch Cues Inventory for (Child/Student): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| **Action/Event** | **Touch Cue** | **Comments** |
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Team members contributing (list names, roles):