

TALKING MATS™

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What is Talking Mats™?

Talking Mats™ is an interactive low technology visual communication framework that uses picture symbols to allow people with little or no functional speech (LNFS) to effectively express their views and opinions on a range of issues which affect their lives. It then presents these opinions pictorially as a visual/imaged report. Below is an example of how a Talking Mats™ was used with a potential AAC client to explore his



opinions and feelings about a range of communication options.

How to use a Talking Mats™

Talking Mats™ uses 3 sets of picture symbols - **topics**, **options** and **a visual scale**.

1. Topics

The subject under discussion (i.e., anything about which the person wants to talk) is presented as a picture symbol in the middle of the mat. Topics could, for example, include issues relating to quality of life or activities of daily living.

2. Options

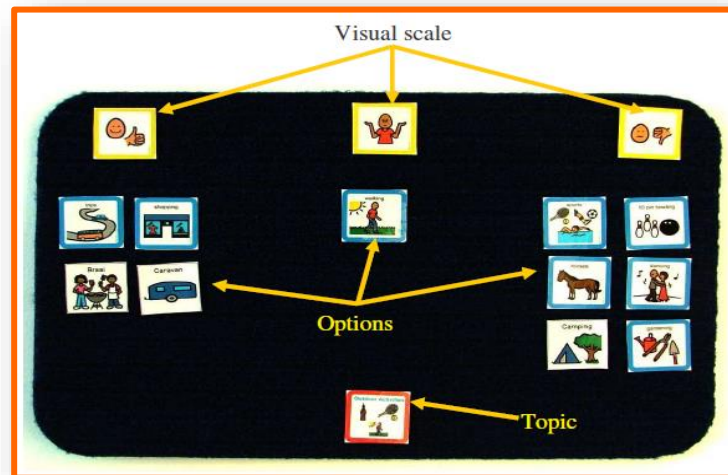
Options for each topic are then represented visually using pictures or picture symbols which can be specifically designed on a programme like Boardmaker® or any graphic representations which are readily available.

3. Visual Scale (Emotions)

A visual scale allows the client to relate his feelings about each option. For example a 3 point visual scale presented at the top of the mat can range from positive aspects

such as: 1) Things I like/am happy with, 2) Things I am unsure about and 3) Things which I don't like/ I'm sad about. The number of possibilities along the visual scale can be increased but one should be aware of each individual client's memory skills.

(Please note that a set of starter symbols can be found in Chapter 14 of this resource manual.)



The client then indicates his opinion by actively placing the symbol himself along the visual scale or can direct the therapist using eye gaze if he does not have the motor ability.

Talking Mats™ - What you need

1. Buy a small textured door mat/car mat (available at most supermarkets).
2. Get sticky back Velcro and attach it to the symbols.
3. Think about your client.
4. Get the client's permission to undertake a talking mat.
5. Think about the topics you may want to explore with the client and give him the opportunity to choose the topic.
6. Mind map the options –make them as concrete and specific as you can – **keep it simple.**
7. Decide on your range of emotions and symbols.
8. Make up your symbols.
9. Include blanks.
10. Include training topics (if required).
11. Cut up the pictures and stick on the Velcro.
12. Think about your client's level of language particularly his comprehension level.
13. Think about your language level and the adaptations you may have to make.

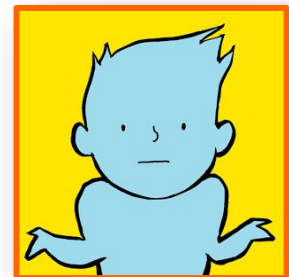
Using the mat with your client

1. Describe the symbols on the visual scale- keep your language consistent and clear.

2. Practice with a training topic [pets or food] to check if the client understands the process - you may have to demonstrate first your own food likes / dislikes e.g., "How do you feel about snakes?"; "How do you feel about ice-cream?"
3. Explain the topic that you are going to talk about.
4. Present the options one at a time using open questions e.g., what do you feel about.....
5. Give the client time to respond. Do not rush, silence is acceptable.
6. It is fine for the client / participant to miss out options.
7. Note any particular nonverbal or verbal response and add in blanks as necessary.
8. Once the mat is complete confirm that the client is happy with each option.
9. Take a digital photo as a permanent record of the client's Talking Mat.

Talking Mats™ App

For those more technologically minded, Talking Mats™ is also now available digitally as an app in the [iTunes](#) and [google play](#) stores. There is also a free trial version that can be downloaded which will allow you to test the product before deciding to purchase. For more interesting information about Talking Mats™ you can also visit the [Talking Mats™ website](#).



References

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