How to Master the Yes/No Game

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How many times in a day do you say "yes"?

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How do we communicate "yes" & "no"?

How?

- Verbal
  - Say "yes", "yup"
  - Say "no", "nope"
  - Other sounds of agreement or disagreement (a-ha, uh-u)
- Thumbs up/thumbs down
- Nodding/shaking head
- Reaching out/pushing away
- Turning away

Why?

- Make choices
- Answer questions
- Acknowledgement
- Agreement/disagreement
- Give feedback/opinion

The Yes/No game – or, in other words, …living with Rett syndrome

- In the Yes/No game, you have to answer questions without using the words “yes” or “no”
- Rett syndrome is, in some respects, similar:
  - the individual with Rett syndrome has to think of alternative ways to communicate their wants, needs, feelings, opinions & more, rather than using the words “yes” and “no”
- Many parents/carers of those with Rett syndrome report that their child/individual with Rett syndrome has an unusually direct stare, often noticed before there is any sign of Rett syndrome

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Are you looking at me?

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How might someone with Rett syndrome communicate "yes" and "no"?

- Looking at you for "yes", looking away/looking down for "no"
- Smiling
- Nodding
- Blinking eyes (slow or rapid)
- Hand gesture or arm movement
- Making specific sounds
- Doing nothing for "no"
- Looking at or leaning toward symbols for "yes" & "no"

Video examples (removed)

- A sideways look for "yes" can be ever so subtle and ever so quick
- While shaking the head can be a more obvious "no"
- BUT, beware – for some people, shaking the head can also mean "yes"!!
- Looking at you for "yes" and looking away for "no"
- Blinking with both eyes for "yes" may be rapid or may be slow

How can I teach the person I support/care for to say "yes" & "no"?

- Look for a natural movement
- Give it meaning – describe what you see & what you think it means
- Be consistent
- Don't assume you know best
- Go with whatever answer you receive

Video examples (removed)

- Take a behaviour and add meaning
- Be consistent in your response and the behaviour becomes established

How can I use “yes” & “no” to give choices with more than one or two options?

Video examples (removed)

- Choosing between three material things…
- Giving verbal options one after another…
- Giving verbal options as a list…

- You can add “something else...” as an option
- When giving verbal options, give no more than 3, 4, or 5 at a time (this will help you to remember what they are!)
- Say the complete set of options first, then repeat slowly, waiting for a “yes” or “no” after each
- Be consistent – repeat the options in the same order

How can I use “yes” & “no” to do more than giving choices of material things?

Video examples (removed)

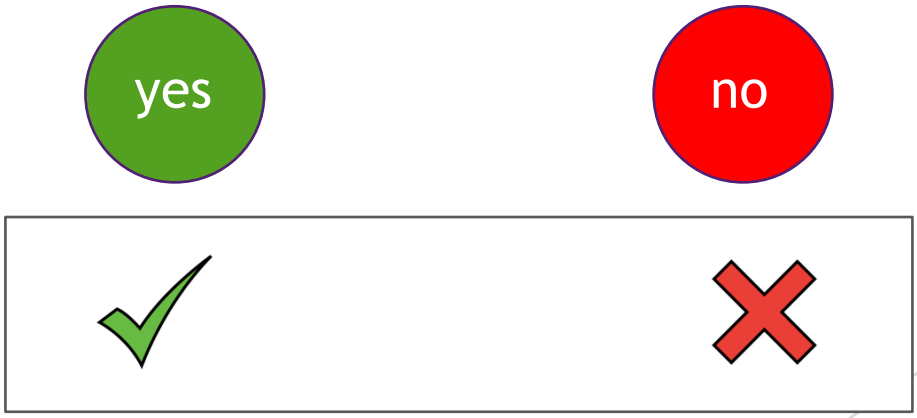
- Playing I-spy...
- Expressing daily needs, and having some control over activities...
- Commenting on an activity/giving an opinion...

How do I know the person with Rett syndrome actually means it?

More video examples (removed)…

- Treat the person as though they mean it
- Add meaning to their behaviours, give feedback
- Believe they can make choices, can engage in conversation and do have an opinion
- Don't think you need to "test" them all the time!

Adding yes/no symbols or written words



created using ARASAAC symbols

Video examples (removed)

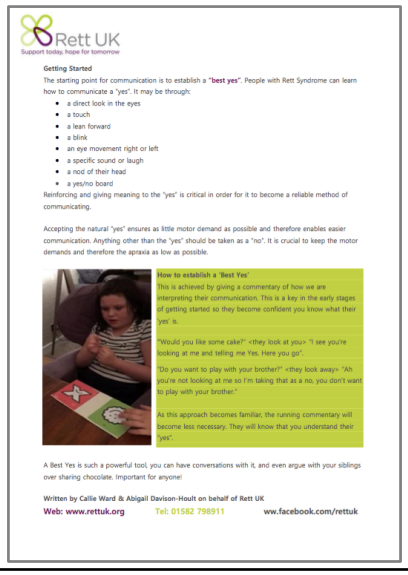
- Using individual symbols…
- Using a low tech book…
- Using symbols on a high tech device…

Isn't a high tech device more useful than just "yes" & "no"?

If you can develop a consistent “yes” and “no” response without technology
you can use it anywhere, at any time!

Make sure everyone knows what the yes/no signals are and responds in the same way

https://www.rettuk.org/resources/resources-for-families/communication/



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Getting Started

The starting point for communication is to establish a **“best yes”**. People with Rett Syndrome can learn how to communicate a “yes”. It may be through:

- a direct look in the eyes
- a touch
- a lean forward
- a blink
- an eye movement right or left
- a specific sound or laugh
- a nod of their head
- a yes/no board

Reinforcing and giving meaning to the “yes” is critical in order for it to become a reliable method of communicating.

Accepting the natural “yes” ensures as little motor demand as possible and therefore enables easier communication. Anything other than the “yes” should be taken as a “no”. It is crucial to keep the motor demands and therefore the apraxia as low as possible.

How to establish a ‘Best Yes’

This is achieved by giving a commentary of how we are interpreting their communication. This is a key in the early stages of getting started so they become confident you know what their ‘yes’ is.

“Would you like some cake?” <they look at you> “I see you’re looking at me and telling me Yes. Here you go”.

“Do you want to play with your brother?” <they look away> “Ah you’re not looking at me so I’m taking that as a no, you don’t want to play with your brother.”

As this approach becomes familiar, the running commentary will become less necessary. They will know that you understand their ‘yes’.

A Best Yes is such a powerful tool, you can have conversations with it, and even argue with your siblings over sharing chocolate. Important for anyone!

Written by Callie Ward & Abigail Davison-Hoult on behalf of Rett UK
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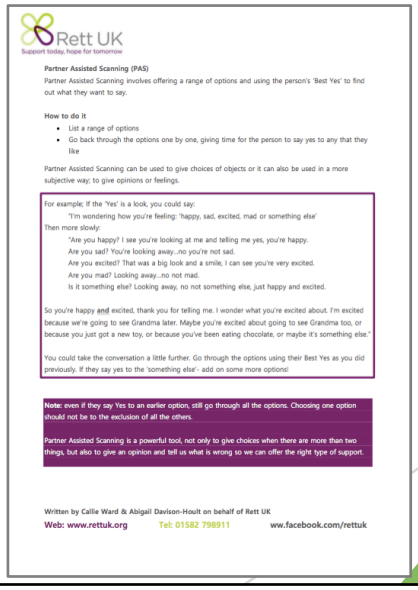

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Partner Assisted Scanning (PAS)

Partner Assisted Scanning involves offering a range of options and using the person’s ‘Best Yes’ to find out what they want to say.

How to do it

- List a range of options
- Go back through the options one by one, giving time for the person to say yes to any that they like

Partner Assisted Scanning can be used to give choices of objects or it can also be used in a more subjective way; to give opinions or feelings.

For example; If the ‘Yes’ is a look, you could say:
“I’m wondering how you’re feeling: ‘happy, sad, excited, mad or something else’
Then more slowly:
“Are you happy? I see you’re looking at me and telling me yes, you’re happy.
Are you sad? You’re looking away…no you’re not sad.
Are you excited? That was a big look and a smile, I can see you’re very excited.
Are you mad? Looking away…no not mad.
Is it something else? Looking away, no not something else, just happy and excited.

So you’re happy and excited, thank you for telling me. I wonder what you’re excited about. I’m excited because we’re going to see Grandma later. Maybe you’re excited about going to see Grandma too, or because you just got a new toy, or because you’ve been eating chocolate, or maybe it’s something else.”

You could take the conversation a little further. Go through the options using their Best Yes as you did previously. If they say yes to the ‘something else’- add on some more options!

Note: even if they say Yes to an earlier option, still go through all the options. Choosing one option should not be to the exclusion of all the others.

Partner Assisted Scanning is a powerful tool, not only to give choices when there are more than two things, but also to give an opinion and tell us what is wrong so we can offer the right type of support.

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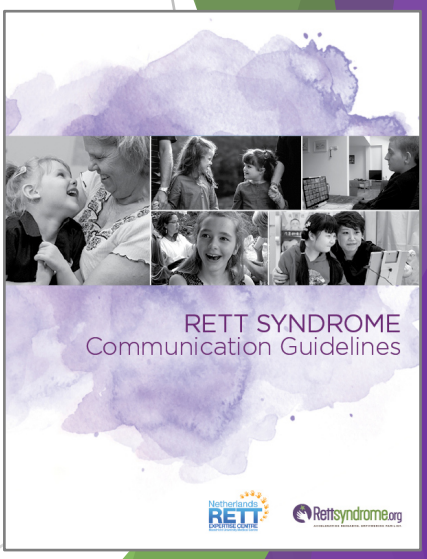
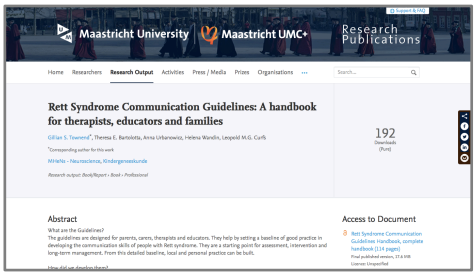
NEW **Communication Guidelines for Rett Syndrome**

Guidelines Handbook



- Now released
- Free download available from: https://cris.maastrichtuniversity.nl/en/publications/rett-syndrome-communication-guidelines-a-handbook-for-therapists-

Download page



Communication Support Coffee & Chat - Tuesday 26th May, 3-4pm

Is there freedom in control?

- People with Rett syndrome are often described as "locked in": they are so very much more aware and able than they were previously given credit for yet still have to endure feeling helpless in so many aspects of their lives. Offering an element of control where there is little opportunity for autonomy allows the development of communication, building confidence and self esteem.
- This online event offers advice and support from two of Rett UK's Regional Communication Champions highlighting ways in which you can offer your family member with Rett syndrome to take an element of control over their daily lives. You will also be able to chat with other parents/parent carers in the same boat, sharing tips and ideas.
- Register now and you will be sent a link to join via ZOOM: https://forms.gle/aEQcgS16fLoVdj8V8

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In the meantime, if you have communication-related questions or concerns, or need communication support…

- Call 07487 526786
- Or send an email to: abigail.davison-hoult@rettuk.org

And, if you have general questions or concerns, or need support for other issues…

- Call the Rett UK helpline, open for extended hours, 9am – 10pm
- 07557 850025 Mondays, Wednesdays and Sundays
  07557 850024 Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays
- You can also email support@rettuk.org
- Or send us a message through our Facebook page
- And you can go to the COVID-19 section of the Rett UK website: https://www.rettuk.org/covid19/