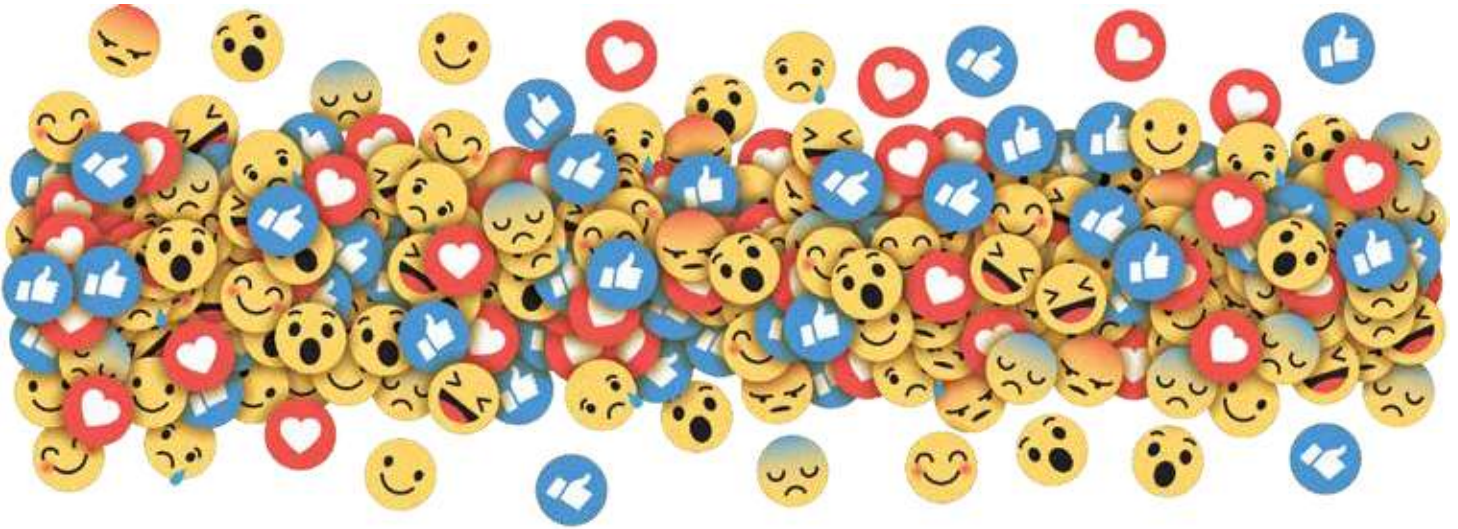
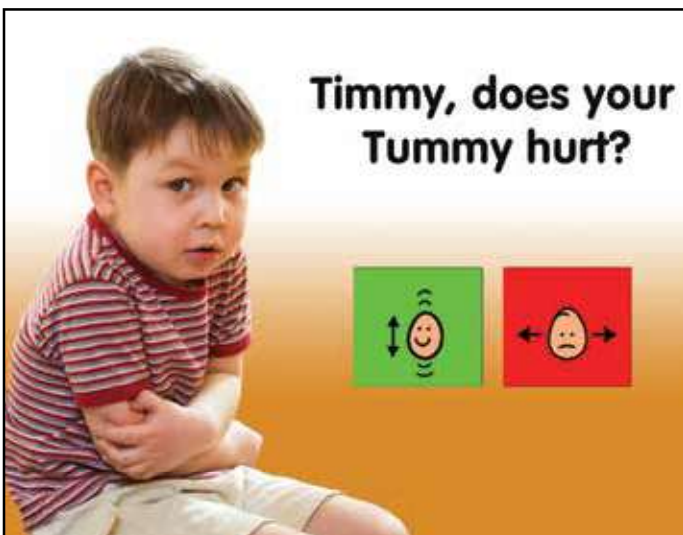


Can You See It?



By Lois Jean Brady



Visual symbols are commonly used in communication systems for individuals with autism, offering stable imagery unlike fleeting spoken words. The abstract nature of these symbols can lead to confusion, making it challenging to provide clear answers to everyday questions. This ambiguity can hinder communication for non-speaking individuals.

Let's consider the symbols for "yes" and "no."



The icons represent abstract meanings that require interpretation: on the left, a smiling face accompanied by curved lines and vertical arrows signifies "yes," while on the right, an unsmiling face with horizontal arrows represents "no."

Symbols like these are commonly used for individuals on the autism spectrum, who often find ambiguous information challenging, can impose a confusing and sometimes illogical link between specific emotions and a straightforward yes/no response.

For example, questions like

- **Did you get a flat tire?**
- **Does your stomach hurt?**
- **Do you have homework?**

The widespread use of abstract symbols for autistic individuals in AAC systems has been unchallenged, despite their vague nature without accompanying text. Autistic children may prefer non-verbal communication, finding it more intuitive for human interaction.

Emojis and written words present a universally accessible form of communication, effectively bridging the gap for individuals who struggle with direct expression. These symbols and text are immediately recognizable across cultures, facilitating clearer communication without the ambiguity of abstract icons. By leveraging these tools, we can provide a more inclusive and understandable means of interaction that aligns with global communication trends.

It's critical to move beyond the outdated belief that non-speaking children are unable to learn word recognition. With evidence showing their capability to identify patterns and subsequently learn to read, it's imperative that we equip them with the appropriate resources and maintain high expectations. Tailored educational strategies and the integration of universally accepted symbols can significantly enhance the learning experience, empowering these children to communicate more effectively with the world around them. ■