

How to use a Talking Mat

The Purpose

Talking Mats can be used to gather a pupil's views for practical, meaningful topics relevant to the thinker. It can help us explore a discussion topic without the need to use lots of speech, which can be helpful for some learners. It also provides visual choices which can be easier for some pupils to process. It is an adaptable tool which can be used for a range of abilities.

Think

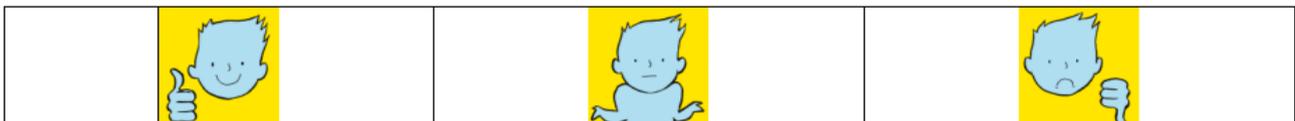
What is the purpose of the scale? If you plan it well it is a really useful tool.

What do you need:

- A background that the symbols can be placed/stuck onto – a piece of felt or mat can be good for this, or you could use a large piece of plastic board
- 'Top Scale' symbols (see further details below)
- Visual symbols for introductory subject e.g. animals, foods
- Visual symbols for subjects you wish to encourage the pupil to talk about e.g. school routines, social situations, school subjects, learning styles
- Blank symbols that can be written on and added to the Talking Mat if the pupil wants to include other examples that there aren't symbols for. Alternatively post its work just as well.

The Top Scale

Start with top scales that will have meaning for the thinker. Like/not like or happy/not happy may not be the most concrete/ understandable for that person. These concepts may need to be taught through targeted activities first. If needed, the mid point can be removed to reduce the cognitive load for the thinker.



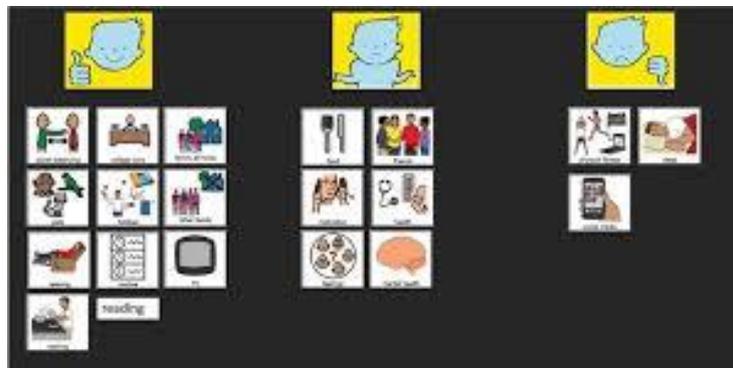
Some thinkers may respond better to symbols without facial expressions, for example using just thumbs up/down for a top scale such as good/not good.



How to do it

- Find a quiet space with no distractions.
- Begin by talking about the Top Scale symbols and ensuring the pupil understands what the different options are e.g. I like it / it is ok / I don't like it.
- Next use an introductory topic which isn't linked to school, to model how to use the Talking Mat e.g. animals, food, hobbies. The adult can also model their choices first, so they show the pupil how we use the Talking Mat.

- We can then move onto topics which you wish to focus on e.g. sensory preferences, school subjects, supports that can help etc. You can create symbols for any 'tricky issue' that you would like to explore and gain the pupil's views.
- Put positives on left and negatives on right.
- When the pupil has sorted the symbols using the 'top scale', you can then give them the option of using a blank symbol to add any extra ones that we may not have a symbol for. You can write on these using a whiteboard pen.
- If the pupil is happy for you to keep a record of this discussion, you can take a photo of it as a quick way of recording it.
- When you've categorised all the visuals go through them to clarify. When going over it, start with negatives first so you end with positives. Then finally, always give them the opportunity to change the mat ie 'are you happy with the mat?'
- **You can do a sub-mat next if there is anything on the talking mat that needs to be explored further.**



Other points

- Get the learner to place the visuals if possible.
- Be aware of your tone of voice so you don't influence them.
- Take into account processing time and don't change your language. Repeat and WAIT.
- The purpose of the mat is to categorise not to enter in a big discussion (although it can be a vehicle for discussion).

Example top Scales

- What's going well / sometimes going well / not going well
- What helps / Not sure / Doesn't help
- Can do / Need some help / Need a lot of help
- Things you do / don't do
(there may be things they'd like to do but can't do ie sensory issues, physical disabilities etc.)

There is a talking mats website and Facebook page for ideas too.