



FUNCTIONAL ADULT OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Free Resource Pack 2

Functional Communication & Choice-Making Pack

5 adult-appropriate activity ideas to support choice, preference, self-advocacy and participation for adults with intellectual disabilities

Choice • Voice • Respect • Participation • Low-arousal support

Who is this pack for?

Occupational therapists, Occupational Therapy Students, caregivers, support staff, families and residential-care teams who need practical, meaningful ways to support communication, autonomy and participation.

Designed as a starter pack for everyday use

Welcome

Functional Adult OT is built around a simple belief: adults should be supported to participate in daily life with dignity, choice and respect. Communication is not limited to spoken words. A person may communicate through gestures, facial expressions, body movement, pointing, objects, pictures, sounds, routines or behaviour. When we slow down and pay attention, we can create more opportunities for the person to express preferences, make choices, ask for help, refuse, and take part in meaningful routines.

This free pack includes five low-cost, practical activities that can be used in home, therapy, day programme or residential-care settings. Each activity is designed to support functional communication, choice-making, self-advocacy and participation in an adult-appropriate way.

Core approach

Focus on communication before compliance. The goal is not to make the person choose what we want them to choose. The goal is to create safe, respectful opportunities for the person to express themselves, experience control and participate in real-life routines.

How to use this pack

- Choose one activity that fits the person's current energy level, communication style and routine.
- Use real objects or clear visual supports where possible.
- Offer simple, realistic choices rather than too many options at once.
- Pause and allow time for processing before repeating yourself.
- Accept non-verbal responses such as pointing, reaching, facial expression, body movement or walking away.
- Follow through on the choice where possible so communication feels meaningful.

Important note and disclaimer

This pack is intended as a general educational and practical resource. It does not replace individual occupational therapy assessment, clinical reasoning, safeguarding procedures, medical advice, behavioural support planning or facility-specific policies.

Always consider the person's communication method, sensory profile, hearing or vision needs, medical history, swallowing safety, mobility, behaviour support plan, trauma history, literacy level, risk profile and personal preferences before introducing an activity.

Use with dignity

Adults with intellectual disabilities deserve real opportunities to express preferences, refuse, ask for help and take part in daily life. A choice is only meaningful if the person can choose something different, including "not now".

Quick activity planning guide

Activity	Main focus	Best for	Support level
Choosing between two options	Choice-making, preference expression	Meals, clothing, leisure, routines	Low to moderate
Help card or break card practice	Self-advocacy, emotional regulation	Overwhelm, difficult tasks, transitions	Moderate
Making a simple drink order	Requesting, sequencing, social communication	Snack/drink routines	Low to moderate
Leisure choice board	Autonomy, motivation, participation	Free time or group planning	Low to high
Yes / No / Not now practice	Consent, refusal, boundaries	Daily care, ADLs, transitions	Moderate to high

Low-arousal reminder

Keep communication calm, predictable and simple. Offer one small choice at a time. Use a warm tone, short phrases and enough pause time.

Activity 1: Choosing between two options

Purpose

Supports choice-making, preference expression, autonomy, communication, attention and participation in everyday routines.

You will need

- Two real objects, pictures, clothing items, snacks, drinks or activity options
- A quiet space
- Optional choice board or tray
- Enough time for the person to process and respond

Step-by-step

1. Choose two realistic options that are both available.
2. Place the options where the person can see or reach them.
3. Use simple language, for example: "Tea or juice?"
4. Pause and give the person time to respond.
5. Accept their response, even if it is different from what you expected.
6. Name the choice back to them: "You chose juice."
7. Follow through with the chosen option where possible.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Offer only two very different options.	Offer three options.
Use real objects instead of pictures.	Use pictures or symbols only.
Present the items one at a time.	Ask the person to explain or show why they chose it.
Use familiar routines such as snack or clothing choice.	Use choices across different routines during the day.
Low-arousal tips	Avoid repeating the question too many times. Ask once, wait, and give the person time to process. Too much verbal prompting can feel pressurising.
Staff/caregiver role	Offer genuine choices and respect the response. Avoid steering the person toward the option you prefer unless there is a safety reason.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for eye gaze, pointing, reaching, facial expression, verbal response, body movement, refusal, or increased confidence when making choices.

Activity 2: Help card or break card practice

Purpose

Supports self-advocacy, emotional regulation, communication of needs, and participation during difficult tasks or transitions.

You will need

- A simple “Help” card and/or “Break” card
- Optional lanyard, clip or small keyring
- A quiet practice setting
- One familiar task or routine

Step-by-step

1. Show the card and explain what it means.
2. Model how to use it during a simple task.
3. Practice during a calm moment first.
4. Prompt the person to use the card if they seem stuck or overwhelmed.
5. Respond to the request straight away where possible.
6. Keep the break short and predictable if a break card is used.
7. Return gently to the activity or next step.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Use one card only.	Offer both help and break cards.
Pair the card with a verbal model or gesture.	Use the cards in different settings.
Practice during calm moments.	Ask the person to return after a timed break.
Hand the card directly to the person.	Add a simple visual timer or first-then support.
Low-arousal tips	Do not wait until the person is highly distressed. Introduce the card proactively and keep your response calm and predictable.
Staff/caregiver role	Take the request seriously and follow through consistently. Avoid treating the card as bad behaviour. It is a communication tool.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for more appropriate help-seeking, reduced escalation, awareness of when support is needed, and improved tolerance of tasks or transitions.

Activity 3: Making a simple drink order

Purpose

Supports requesting, sequencing, attention, social communication and participation in everyday snack or drink routines.

You will need

- Two to three drink options
- Cups and a tray if helpful
- A picture menu or real drink items
- A quiet snack area
- Support with safe handling if needed

Step-by-step

1. Show the available drink options.
2. Ask a simple question such as "Tea or juice?"
3. Allow the person to choose by word, pointing, looking or reaching.
4. Support them to gather the cup and chosen drink.
5. Assist with pouring or carrying if needed.
6. Name the order back to them.
7. Enjoy the drink as part of the routine.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Offer only two options.	Use a picture menu.
Use real drinks that are visible.	Add a second choice such as milk, sugar or ice.
Prepare most of the steps in advance.	Ask the person to request from another person.
Use yes/no choices.	Include carrying the drink and clearing away.
Low-arousal tips	Keep the pace slow and the choices limited. Too many options at once can become overwhelming.
Staff/caregiver role	Accept different forms of communication and support safe food and fluid handling. Prioritise success, not perfection.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for clear requesting, initiation, confidence, and increased participation in snack or mealtime routines.

Activity 4: Leisure choice board

Purpose

Supports autonomy, motivation, initiation, structured free time and participation in meaningful leisure activities.

You will need	Step-by-step
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A small board, tray or table space• Two to five leisure choices• Real items or photos of activities• A calm area• Optional “finished” basket or box	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Select a few meaningful leisure options.2. Place the options where the person can clearly see them.3. Invite the person to choose one activity.4. Allow time to look, point, pick up or indicate a choice.5. Set up the chosen activity together.6. Keep a clear beginning, middle and end.7. Review what they enjoyed afterwards.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Offer only two choices.	Offer four to five choices.
Use highly preferred items.	Ask the person to help set up and pack away.
Use real objects instead of photos.	Choose an activity for later in the schedule.
Keep the activity brief.	Rotate options weekly.
Low-arousal tips	Too many choices can be overwhelming. Keep the board uncluttered and use only a small number of options at one time.
Staff/caregiver role	Observe patterns of interest, support the setup, and avoid forcing non-preferred options. The goal is meaningful participation.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for more independent leisure selection, improved engagement, reduced aimlessness, and clearer expression of preference.

Activity 5: Yes / No / Not now practice

Purpose

Supports consent, refusal, boundaries, preference expression, and participation in daily care and transitions.

You will need

- Yes / No / Not now cards or symbols
- A mirror or simple visuals if helpful
- One to two routine opportunities such as snack, grooming or activity choice
- A calm setting

Step-by-step

1. Teach the meaning of yes, no and not now using simple examples.
2. Model the responses yourself.
3. Ask clear questions with genuine options.
4. Accept the person's response.
5. If they say "not now", offer an alternative or return later.
6. Repeat this across everyday routines.
7. Praise clear communication rather than a particular answer.

How to grade the activity

Make it easier	Make it harder
Start with yes and no only.	Add "not now".
Use very clear preferred versus non-preferred items.	Practice during ADLs and transitions.
Model with gestures.	Ask the person to pair the response with pointing or an object.
Ask one question at a time.	Encourage spontaneous use.
Low-arousal tips	Refusal is communication, not defiance. Stay calm and avoid arguing when the person communicates "no" or "not now".
Staff/caregiver role	Respect boundaries where it is safe to do so. When a limit is unavoidable, explain simply and maintain a calm, respectful tone.
Functional outcome to notice	Look for more confident refusal or consent, less distress, improved trust, and greater participation when the person feels heard.

Communication planning template

Section	Notes
Activity or routine	
Communication goal	
How the person may respond	
Supports or visuals needed	
How I will offer choice	
What success might look like	
What to try next time	

Communication Check In

How do I know if communication was successful?

Communication does not need to be verbal or perfect to be successful. Success may look different for each person and may change from day to day.

- showed interest or curiosity
- made a choice
- pointed, reached or looked toward something
- used a gesture, picture, object or word
- asked for help or a break
- refused or said “not now”
- tolerated support
- returned later
- appeared calmer, more confident or more engaged

What you noticed	What it might mean	What to try next time
The person refused the activity	They may not understand it, feel overwhelmed, or not be interested today	Offer a choice between two activities, reduce demands, or try again later
The person walked away	The activity may have been too long, too difficult, or not motivating	Shorten the activity, start with one simple step, or use a familiar item
The person became upset or agitated	The environment, task demand, noise, or prompting may have been too much	Reduce noise, use fewer words, slow down, and give more space
The person needed a lot of help	The activity may be too complex at this stage	Break it into smaller steps and support one step at a time
The person completed it very quickly	The activity may be too easy or not engaging enough	Add a choice, extra step, sorting element, or responsibility
The person made "mistakes"	They may still be learning the sequence or may need visual support	Use modelling, photos, demonstration, or hand-over-hand support where appropriate
The person only watched	Observation can still be participation	Allow watching first, then invite them to assist with one small part
The person became silly or distracted	The activity may need clearer structure or boundaries	Use a clear beginning, middle, and end; reduce distractions
The person was fixated on one item	The item may be highly preferred or sensory seeking	Use that interest as part of the activity, but set gentle limits
The activity felt too childish	The task may not feel age-appropriate	Use real-life materials and frame it as contribution, routine, or responsibility

Need further guidance?

If you would like more information or support with adapting these activities for your loved one, please feel free to contact us. Functional Adult OT can provide guidance on how to implement meaningful, adult-appropriate activities in a way that supports dignity, participation, and individual needs.

Email: admin@functionaladultot.com

Instagram: [functionaladultot](https://www.instagram.com/functionaladultot)



Functional Adult Occupational Therapy

Practical activity resources for adult-focused, dignified and functional occupational therapy support.

- Real-life skills
- Structured routines
- Low-arousal support
- Meaningful participation
- Respect, choice and dignity