

Describing eye-pointing in children with severe disabilities.

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For children with cerebral palsy affecting their whole body who have little or no functional speech, the use of looking skills is a major way in which to interact with the world around and communicate with others. For example, by pointing with their eyes to an object (i.e. looking between an object and a communication partner) they might signal interest in that object. Looking skills can also be used as an access method to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems and tools, and as a response modality in language and cognitive assessment.

Many children develop effective looking skills for communication, and for clinicians and families these children's looking behaviours can be straightforward to understand. For some children however there is no agreement between clinicians about looking behaviours that constitute intentional eye-pointing.

In order to support clinicians to describe looking skills in relation to eye-pointing we have established a new, simple descriptive scale. The scale has been developed through the following procedures: (i) a literature review was performed, using the principles of systematic review, in order to explore how eye-pointing is commonly described; (ii) focus group discussions were conducted to develop the descriptive scale's content, form and ease of use; (iii) enhancement of the scale was carried out through an online survey using purposive sampling to target relevant audiences; (iv) the inter-rater and test-retest reliability of the scale is being tested.

In this presentation the clinical and theoretical issues underpinning eye-pointing will be discussed; the descriptive scale will be presented, and its applications discussed. Feedback from delegates is welcomed.