Laser Pointer for Communication

For certain PALS (Patients with ALS), a laser pointer may be a very useful method of communication. This is an inexpensive, quick method to communicate. This method is especially attractive to those PALS who may not be very comfortable with technology. Also, it could be a useful backup system to those who use electronic communication systems.

If you would like to see how this method is used, you can go to the following link: www.youtube.com/user/alscommunication

This method consists of two parts, the laser pointer and the communication board.

Laser Pointer:
- A cheap laser pointer, which is available at most drug stores, can be used as the pointing device. In order to keep the button pressed on the laser pointer, you can wrap a rubber band around the pointer tightly. Then, you can mount it with Velcro to glasses, a visor, a headband, or any other body part that the PALS can move to control the laser pointer.
- There are laser pointers that have an on/off switch so that the pointer can remain on for an extended period of time, here are some examples: (or do a web search for laser pointer on off switch)
  o BSA Optics, model LS650 – www.bsaoptics.com, 954-581-2144
- If the PALS would like to be able to independently turn on/off the laser pointer, then a custom made laser pointer must be used. If you have someone in your family who is handy, we have instructions available to make your own switch adapted laser pointer. Occasionally we have these laser pointers available in our loan closet.

Communication Board:
The placement and design of the communication board is very variable depending on your situation. Some people like to have a very large board placed on a wall in the room where the PALS spend most of their time. If the board is on the wall, you can have a very large amount of information available. Boards can also be created to be placed on a table. The size, location, and design of the board are open to your imagination and how you will be using the system. If you need help with this, please call our Assistive Technology Specialist, Antoinette Verdone, at 212-720-3054.

LASER POINTER SAFETY

If a person stares directly into the laser beam for an extended period of time, it can burn the retina, and damage the eye. If a person intentionally stared into the laser beam for an extended period of time without moving, it could cause blindness. Momentary viewing is not considered hazardous (0.25 second or less). People tend to blink or look away, which protects the eye. Intentional extended viewing, however, is considered hazardous.
- Do not intentionally point the laser pointer into your eye. Do not look directly into the laser light source.
- Never shine a laser pointer directly into the face of a person, or an animal.
- Do not allow children to play with the laser pointer. The laser pointer is not a toy.
- Do not point the laser pointer at mirrors, or other reflective surfaces. (The reflected light can bounce back into the user’s eye.)
- Do not laminate a communication board that will be used with a laser pointer. The light will reflect back into the face of the person wearing the laser.
- Never view a laser pointer through an optical device such as binoculars or a microscope.
- This system is designed to be used by cognitively intact adults who can ensure that the laser is used in a safe manner. (Laser Pointer Safety and Picture edited from “Simple Laser Pointer for Low-Tech Communication” by Margaret Cotts)