

## 5. Sam button switches - Some important things to remember

(Sam – **S**ong or speech or sound **A**nd **M**usic button – this is what I call the voice output communication devices that you can record onto. There are many different types, all called different things! Sam is easier to remember.

- Aim to put a photo, symbol or word representing the activity on the Sam button or switch. Often this will be under a transparent switch cap. For example, if you will be blowing up balloons, put a picture of a balloon on the switch. It can be very confusing for users when the same button/switch is used for many different purposes.  
(Switch cap pictures can be stored in those plastic pockets designed to hold slides or CDs.)
- Rather than saying “Hit the switch” or “Press the Sam button” try to follow this code and speak specifically referring to a particular activity. You could say, for example, “Sarah, you can sing now.” or “Simon, will you count us in, please.” And maybe let helpers, parents and carers know this too – they nearly always do say “Come on, Jimmy, press the switch.”
- Make sure the Sam / switch activity is rewarding, motivating and fun. That nearly always means that someone is working and interacting directly with the learner. Very rarely can a switch be set up for a learner and then they can be left to get on with it. Battery operated toys and computer programs can become boring quite quickly.
- If you can, use an age and gender appropriate voice and style on any voice output devices, though in practice I know this is sometimes tricky. It is good if the learner can choose whose voice goes on the device. They may choose a friend who is not necessarily of the same gender. And the singing on the Sam button does not have to be perfectly tuneful – rhythm is probably more important.

A few points about recording speech.

- When recording speech, make sure the Sam button speaks out as if the learner is speaking . An example would be “I want the cars to crash again”.
- Even if there is only one instruction, speak it in several different ways on to a sequencing device e.g. Let’s have it again. And another time. Let me see it some more. And more, please. And another time &c.
- On voice output switches, make the speech longer than just one word i.e. not just ‘Yes’ but ‘Ooh yes, ... yes that’d be good.’

When you have assessed and finalized seating and positioning for switching, take photographs so everyone can be consistent in setting up switch activity.