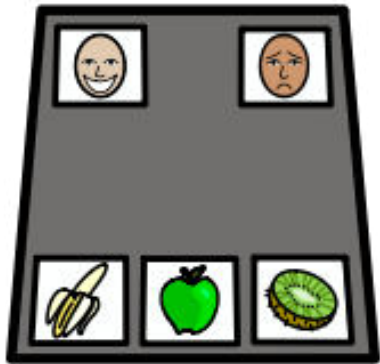


Talking Mats



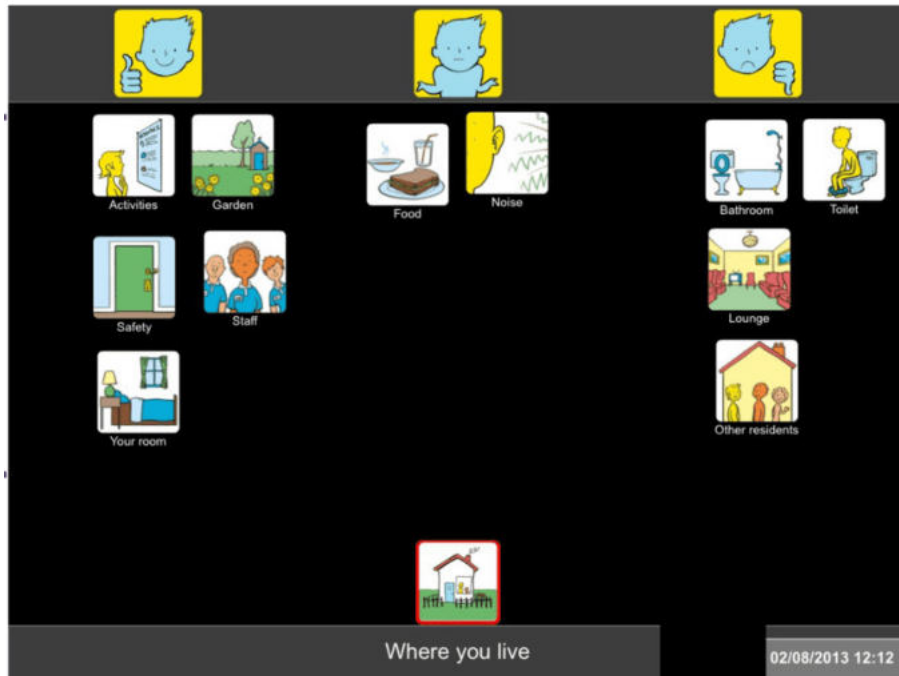
Talking Mats: sharing learning and experience

What is a Talking Mat?

A Talking Mat is an evidence-based **AAC** tool which can be used to facilitate a conversation with someone who has a communication difficulty.

It creates a space for a conversation and allows a person to think about an issue and then share their view.

A Talking Mat can be both low-tech or high-tech.

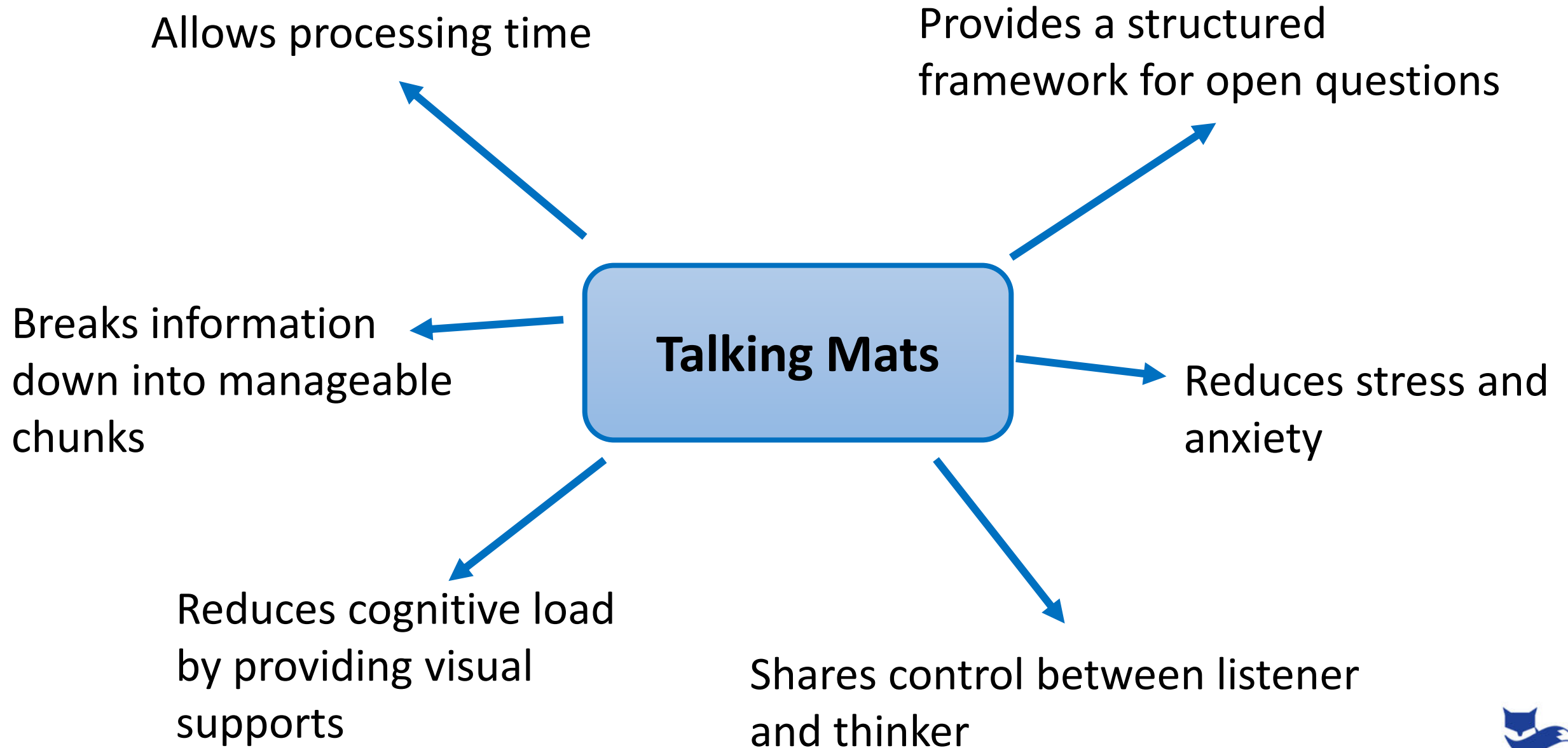


AAC – Augmentative Alternative Communication



Augmentative - add to someone's speech

Alternative - used instead of speech



Listener and Thinker

Listener

Person facilitating the conversation

Provides the framework for supporting communication



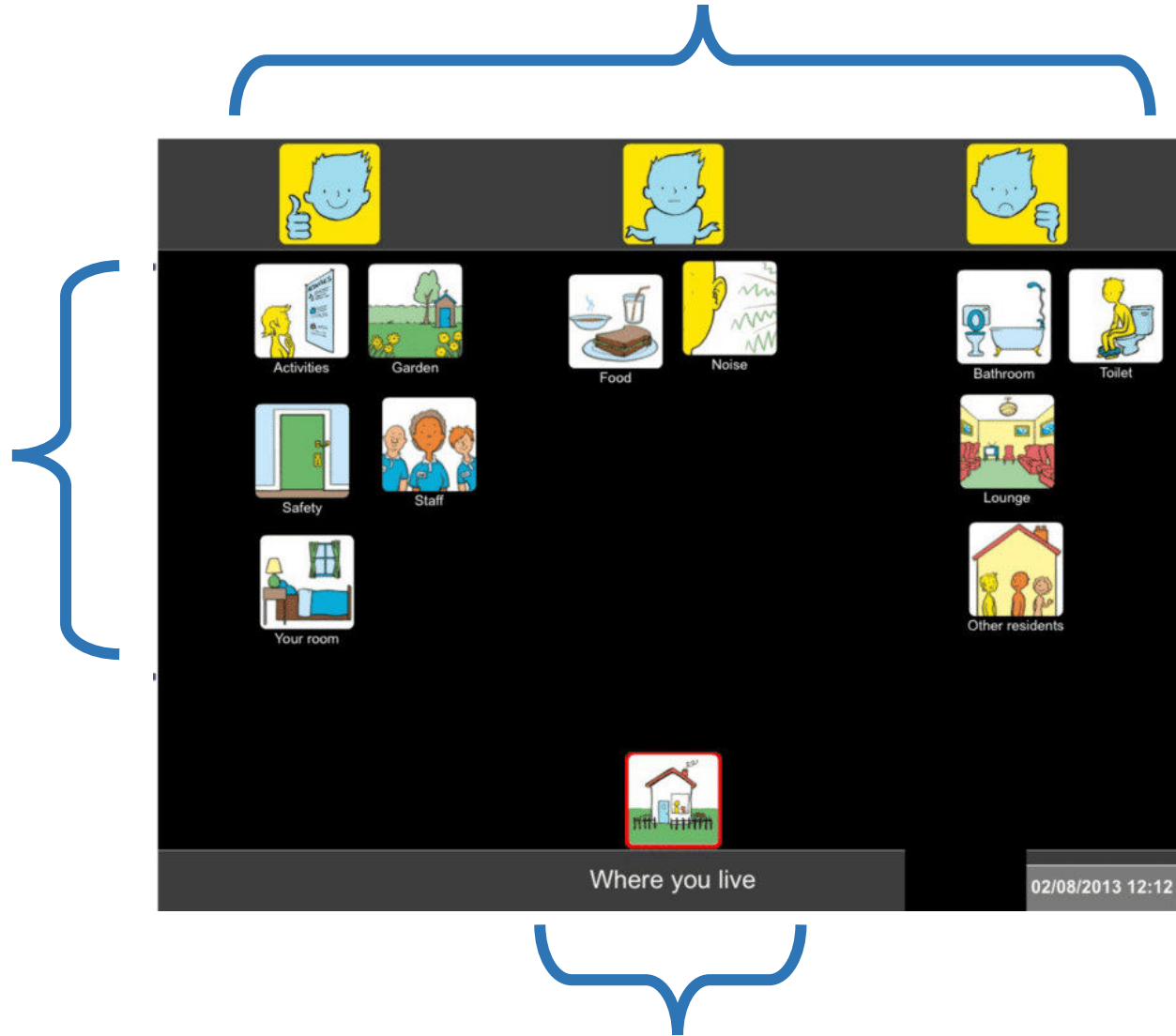
Thinker

Person completing the Talking Mat

Has ownership of the Talking Mat e.g., places symbols on mat

TOP SCALE

OPTIONS



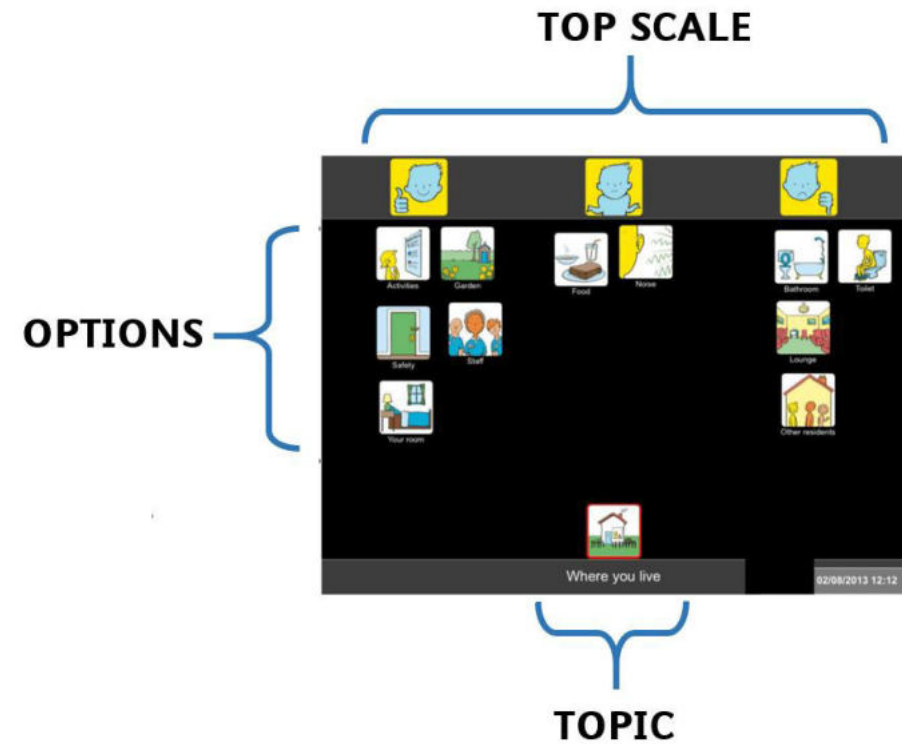
Talking Mats can be used with any symbol system, line drawings or photographs.

TOPIC

TOP SCALE: Frames your question and determines what information you will gather. This is the **key** to a successful Talking Mat.

TOPIC: The subject of conversation

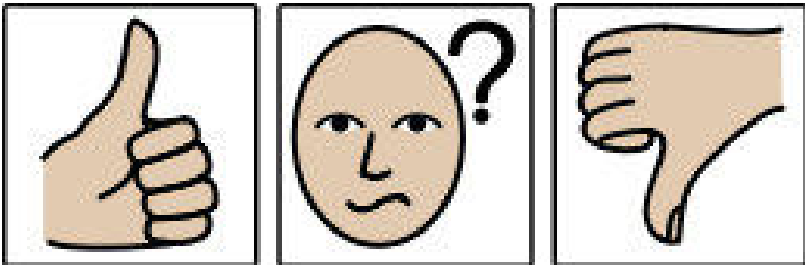
OPTIONS: Symbols related to the topic which help break it down into smaller, more manageable chunks. The number of options will vary, but a good guide is between 15 and 20.



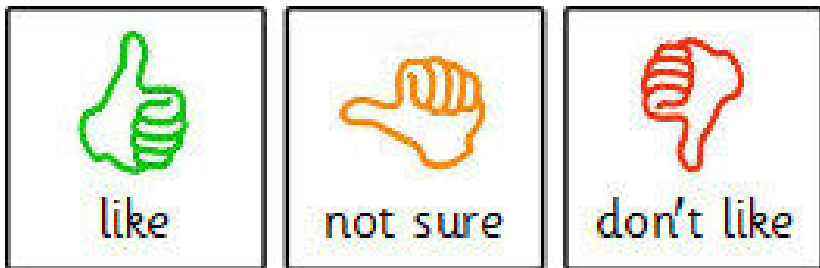
Top Scale



The number of symbols on the visual scale will depend on the cognitive ability of the thinker.

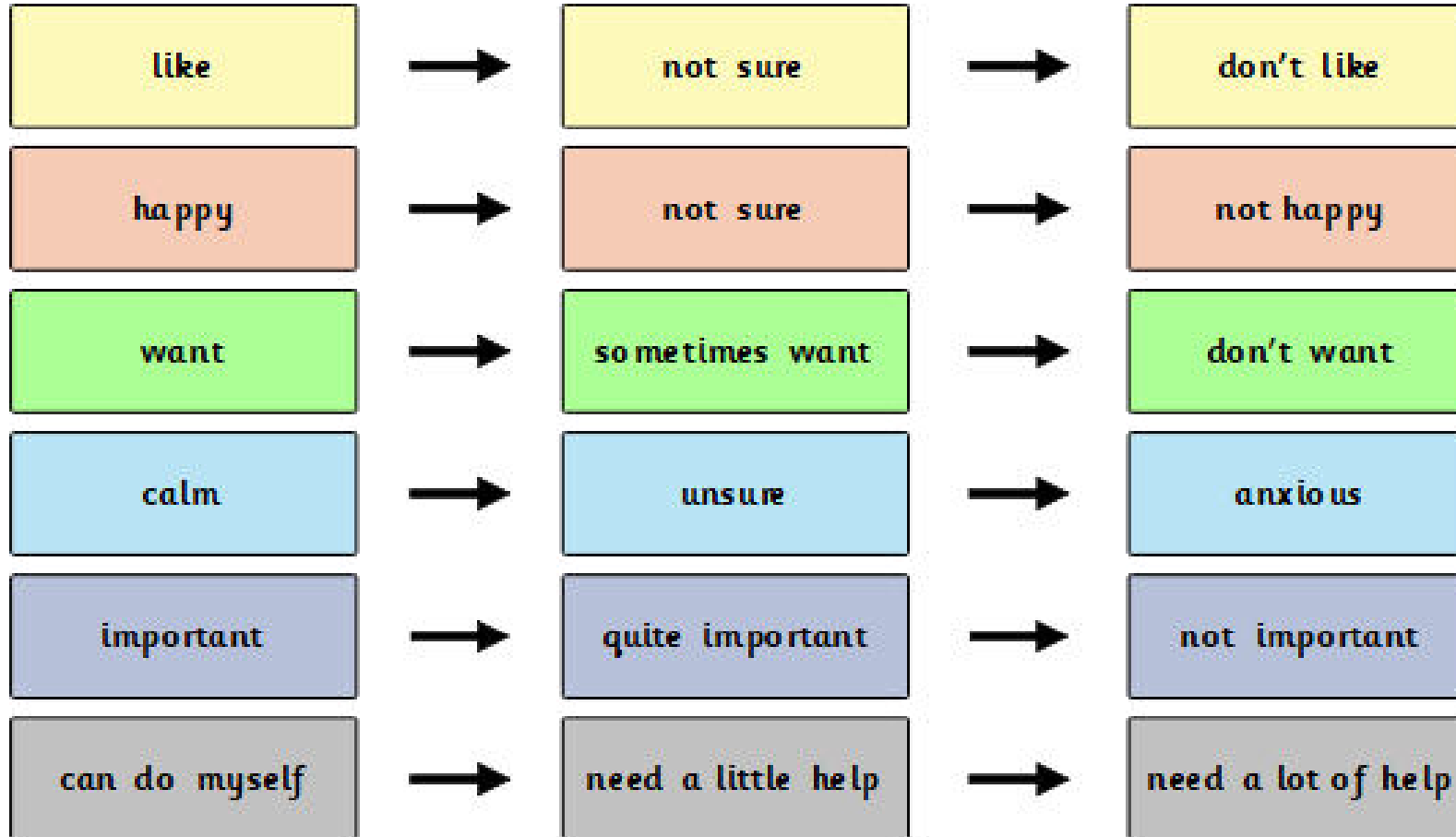


A **3-point scale** works well for people with and without cognitive difficulties.

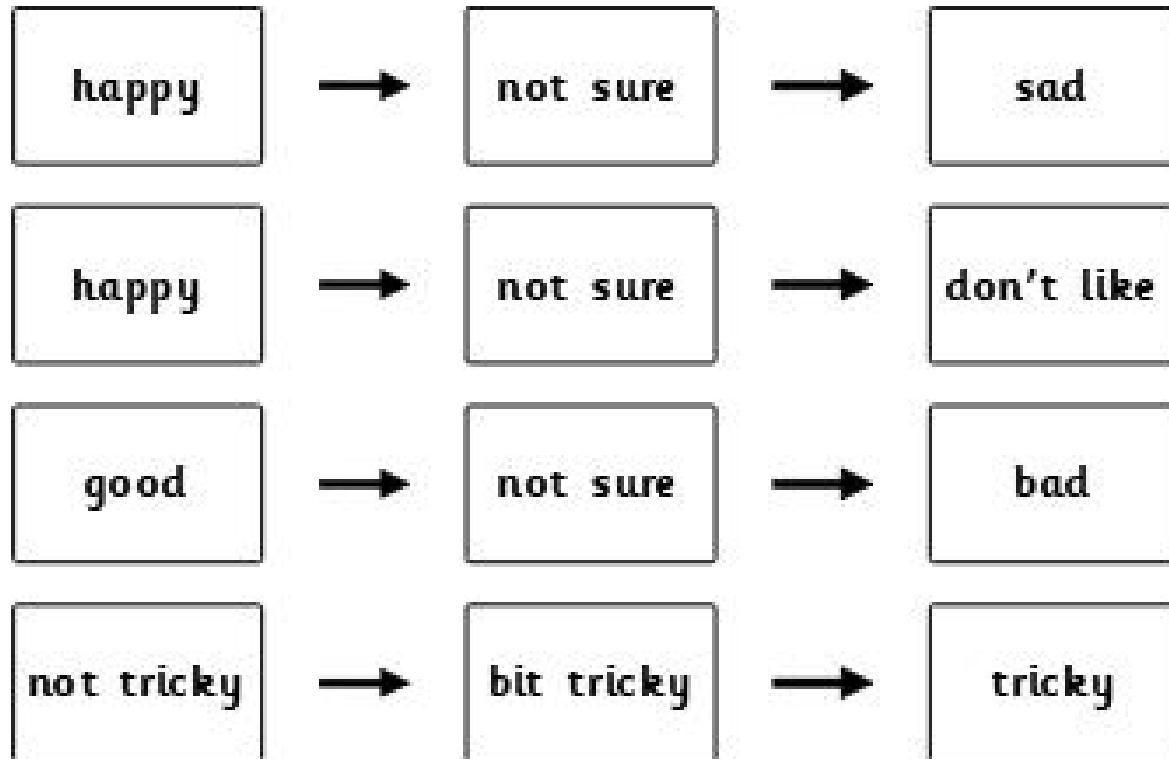


The scale allows concepts to be graded from positive (left-hand side) to negative (right-hand side)

Examples of 3-point Top Scales that work well:



Examples of 3-point Top Scales that don't work well:



False Opposite

Mixed

Not neutral

Back to Front

Listener – Top Tips!

1. Hand control to the thinker e.g., pass thinker symbols for them to place
2. Use a consistent and effective Top Scale
3. Use an open question to promote discussion e.g., “How was your lunch?” vs “Did you enjoy your lunch?”
4. Keep language consistent
5. Position that mat in front of the thinker
6. Use language and vocabulary the thinker will understand
7. Give thinker time to process and respond
8. Be responsive to non-verbal communication e.g., facial expressions, body language and/or gestures
9. Have access to blank cards
10. Review the mat and allow for change(s)
11. Be aware of issues to explore in more detail - use a **sub-mat**



Taking a photograph of the completed Talking Mat is an easy way to record the views expressed during the conversation.

“How do you feel about...?”



Topic for future sub-mat

Sub-mat: opportunity for further discussion



“What do you think about...?”

When is a Talking Mat not a Talking Mat?

Yes or No Top Scale

Questions are likely to be closed which can be leading and suggestive to the thinker.

Implies a right or wrong answer.

Yes

No

Or |

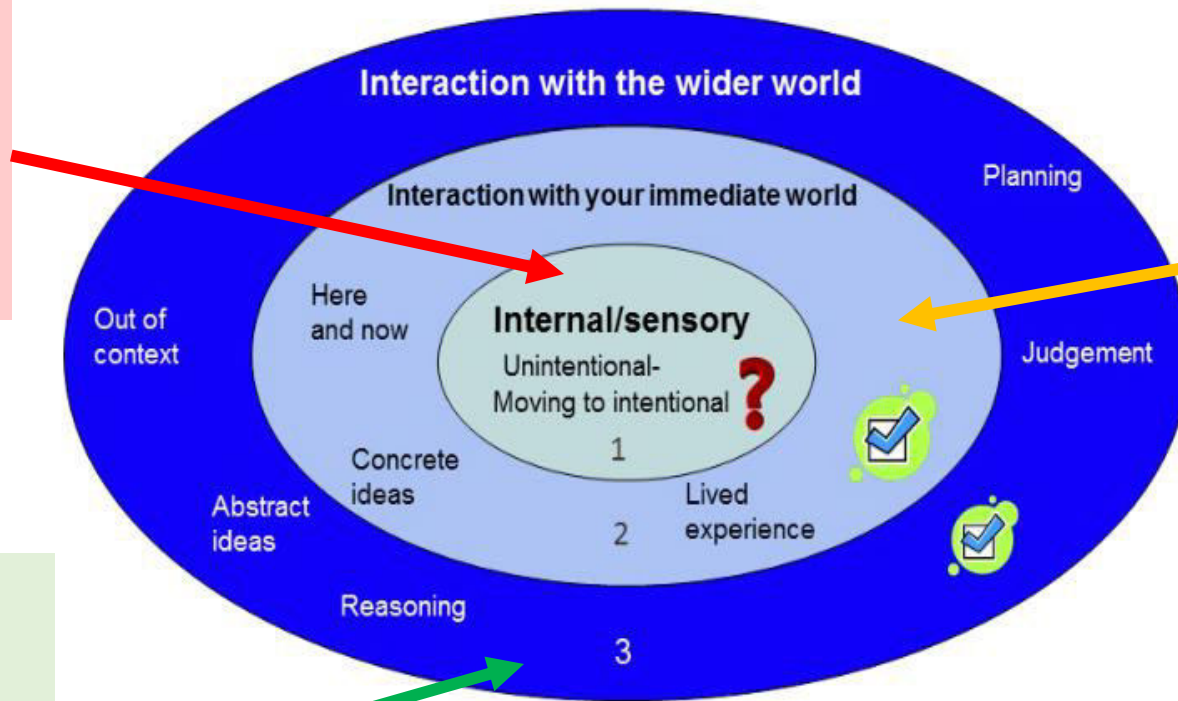
✓

X

Talking Mats will not work for everyone.

Listeners need to have symbolic understanding, some vision and a method of indicating.

Thinkers in Circle 1 will not be able to access Talking Mats to give their view



Thinkers in Circle 2 can use Talking Mats for concrete topics e.g., food, activities, domestic life

Thinkers in Circle 3 can use Talking Mats as a thinking tool

The Circles Model developed by Talking Mats

Environment

What does the thinker associate with room? What are the sensory demands of room?

Relationship

Who is the best person to communicate with thinker?

Considerations

Modelling

Do they see others completing Talking Mats?

Timing

What should the duration of the session be? Will it disrupt routine?

Accessibility

Does the thinker have a VI? Do they have a physical disability?

Explicit teaching

Does the thinker need to learn *how* to express a view? Is a **Teaching Mat** appropriate?

Impact of Talking Mats in Education

Talking Mats can enable people with communication difficulties to share their thoughts, feelings and views.

- Student voice
- Setting personal outcomes and targets e.g., EHCP
- Support preparation for and monitor impact of transitions
- Improving communication and investigation of sensitive or difficult issues, such as safeguarding.

Further reading

www.talkingmats.com

www.communicationmatters.org.uk

