

Power Cards: A “Special” Visual Support

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Power Cards were created by Elisa Gagnon several years ago. They are “special” because they rely on the individual’s “special interest” to draw attention to the skill that is targeted in the support.

I have used these supports with all age groups. I have made a Blues’ Clues Power Card explaining how to get someone’s attention (instead of pulling hair) for a four year old and made a Teen Titan’s Power Card for a young adult to remind him to articulate when talking to his peers. If your client has a special interest, or a character they really enjoy, then these might be a great visual support to integrate into your programming.

There are three primary components to a Power Card; the targeted skill, the character sketch and the actual card.

Targeted Skill: I have had the most luck using Power Cards when the skill I am trying to teach can be broken down in 3-5 steps that I can simply outline in the character sketch and power card. The steps might be sequential, such as ‘how to greet a friend’ or “how to get your lunch in the cafeteria.” Or, the steps might be things to remember such as “how to act in the hallway,” or “my best bus behavior.”

Character Sketch: This is where you set the stage for the skill to be taught and draw the individual in with their special interest character. This is usually one page long, but the length and complexity must be individualized to fit the cognitive skills of your client. The language in the character sketch refers to the special interest doing the skill that you want to teach your client. At the end, the character draws the client into the message by stating something like “The next time you feel frustrated you can use Superman’s strategies to help calm down.”

Power Card: The Power Card is a short and concise summary of the character sketch. Whatever the take home message was in the character sketch is what you want to highlight on the Power Card. For example, if you are writing the support to help teach a client to use specific calming strategies then you outline only the specific strategies with an introductory sentence. So, it might say something like, “When you get upset Superman wants you to remember to 1) Take 3 deep breaths 2) Think to myself “it’s no big deal” 3) Ask to go for a walk.

To implement the Power Card strategy, I typically suggest reading the character sketch and power card together with the students 3-4 times, or until you think that they have the idea behind the support and the special interest has really caught their attention. After that, the power card can be referred to as needed, proactively throughout the day. For example, staff pulled out the Blues Clues power card I made for the four year old out of their pocket anytime the student was going to be waiting in a line or in a social situation with her peers. For the student that used Teen Titans to help him learn to articulate, the staff went of the power card with him before running his expressive language goals, and then would use a non-invasive gesture to refer to it throughout the session if he started having difficulty.

That is another great thing about Power Cards. They can help decrease verbal prompts! Verbal prompts

are THE MOST DIFFICULT prompts to fade and the easiest for student become prompt dependent for. So, having an alternative way to prompt students that also does not draw attention to them, is great!

An example of a potty training Power Card can be found at:

<http://bit.ly/JiGcjD>

<http://bit.ly/Jr4aXC>

In this example, the student's special interest is Elmo! The targeted skill is toilet training. For this particular student the team wanted him to do three things: 1) sit on the toilet 2) wait for the timer to go off and 3) wipe and flush. Wiping and flushing were paired because he had already chained them together.

The character sketch mentions his favorite character, Elmo and posts pictures of Elmo in several spots around the support. I also added a couple of his other favorite characters in the support for additional motivation. The sketch talks about Elmo learning to go potty and the three steps he followed in order to learn. At the end, Elmo lets the student know that he can learn to potty by following the same steps.

The power card simply lays out the three steps the team chose to focus on for the targeted skill. Elmo is placed in several places on the card to encourage the student to attend to the card. The card is 4X6 in size, so it can easily be posted next to the toilet, and/or carried by staff so they can remind the student of the steps when they are on the way to the bathroom.

With the multiple components involved in the Power Card strategy, they can take a little more time than an average visual support to make. However, when you see the student is interested and engaged in the review of the support because it has their special interest sharing strategies to help them be successful...it is well worth the time.

I would love to hear from anyone else that has used Power Cards with their students!

About Lindsay Dutton, MA CCC-SLP