Helping Someone Use Devices with Button Keypads

Your group members may need assistance using common devices, like phones or television remotes, that have buttons they can no longer see. Here are some tips you can use to help your group members.

Questions for assessment

- Do you know what all the buttons do?
- Can you feel or see the buttons? (Some buttons might need enhancing with bump dots.)
- Can you locate the button you need when you want it? (Or are you hitting wrong buttons?)

Familiarization

- Allow the person to explore the device and learn how the buttons are laid out. Describe what each button does as they find it. Use words such as “to the left” and “above.” It may be helpful give an overall description first, depending upon what the person can see of the buttons and how much they like to explore with their hands.
- Encourage them to use touch rather than depend on their sight.
- Explain the different layout of keypads. Some are “7, 8, 9” across the top row (calculators) and others are “1, 2, 3” across the top row (phones).
- The “5” often has a tiny bump on it already. (Have they noticed?) It is also the center of the keypad.
• With complicated remotes it may be helpful to cover buttons that they aren’t using with tape to make a “Don’t bother with it” zone.

• Large button devices may be helpful if their vision permits. However, a person should still be able to dial 911 on a regular phone keypad in case of an emergency, for themselves or others.

Help

The goal is to be able to “dial” sequences of numbers. Wrong numbers usually happen when their eye and hand do not work together. So it is important to emphasize the person’s knowledge of the layout of the numbers.

The technique for dialing is to place three fingers on a row of buttons and then slide up or down the rows with all three fingers.

1. Start by finding the 5. This is the landmark for the middle finger. The index of the right hand is on the 4 and the ring finger is on the 6. Get the person used to this position by asking them to hit the numbers on that row one at a time and then in short sequences (4, 5, 6 then 4, 4, 6, then 6, 4, 5, etc.) This is “Home Row.”

2. Explain that to reach other numbers as you dial, all three fingers slide together up and down the rows as needed. Slide all three fingers up to the top row and repeat.

3. Then try sequences of numbers that involve the two rows. Watch for accuracy and confidence.
4. Repeat for remaining rows: get familiar with the numbers on that row before adding the other numbers into the sequences. Channels on a TV remote are short. Phone numbers take longer to build up to.

Check for understanding:

- Observe and watch for hesitation or mistakes. If the person hesitates or makes an error, go over the instructions again. Talk about some other topic for a few minutes then try a few number sequences.
- If there are buttons with other features to learn go over those and quiz:
  - “Can you show me how you would...?”
  - “What are the steps for...?”
  - “Where do you find the button that does....?”

If your group member can demonstrate an ability to operate the device correctly with confidence, you have been successful in your training.