Implementing Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) for Successful Communication

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What is Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC)?

AAC "includes all forms of communication (other than oral speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas. We all use AAC when we make facial expressions or gestures, use symbols or pictures, or write."

ASHA.org
AAC is **Alternative**, because it focuses on a modality (visual symbols in the case of Communication Books and Speech Generating Devices) that is different than what people typically use for face-to-face interaction.
AAC is **Augmentative**, because it **adds language and symbols** to a person’s existing communication skills vs replacing someone’s gestures, eye-gaze, vocalizations…
How do we learn **language and symbols** and use them to communicate?

**A Receptive Language Model**

Language acquisition for typically developing children occurs as a result of months of exposure to context-based oral language.
Parents and caregivers make language happen!

The meaning of words and symbols is co-constructed with the children’s communication partners, making language acquisition an **interdependent** process

vs **independent task**
Communication is a **community** thing…

The language children develop is based on the community in which they live and the exposure to communication interactions.
What about children who need AAC to communicate?
Applying the Receptive Language Model of language acquisition to children who need AAC means that partners must use the same mode of communication that children are expected to learn and use over time.

Photo credit: niederfamily.blogspot.com
Aided Language Stimulation (or, Hanen™ with visuals…)
It focuses on pragmatics (use of language) in AAC: what, how and when to say it.

Partners use the AAC system to augment their own communication

Visual symbols are paired with voice output and context creating meaning through repetitive exposure and interactions
Communicating with AAC is about giving your child the language to meet today’s needs as well as learning for tomorrow.
Dynamic Assessment and the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky)

- "The difference between what the child can do alone and what they can achieve in collaboration with a skilled partner"

- "the zone is jointly determined by the skills of the child and the structured guidance provided by the partner"

Image credit: Carole Zangari
Things to consider when choosing an AAC tool:

Direct access vs Indirect access

Low-tech visual books vs High-tech Speech Generating Devices

Text-To-Speech
Content Organization – develop automaticity in word retrieval through consistent location and motor memory

• Core and fringe (Proloquo2go Crescendo Vocabulary)

• Comprehensive language generation software (NuVoice, LAMP Words For Life, Speak for Yourself)

• Pre-programmed templates of varying sizes (Touch Chat – Word Power)
Habits that promote successful implementation of an AAC system:

Know your child AAC system – how to retrieve content and how it is organized – and use it!

Tell your child what is happening next: “time for____”

Offer choices of activities, foods, places to go…

Label items and actions: symbol-object/action/feeling correspondence

Comment (good, bad, like, yucky,…)
When you mediate your interaction through the AAC system opportunities for communication will occur naturally…
Use the AAC tool to **acknowledge** that you understand your child’s message by pointing to the visual and verbalizing.
Rehearse communication exchanges:

“let’s ask dad for more cookies, go see dad and point to…”

“we need a red crayon, show Ms. ___ what color you want.”
Expand your child’s communication output by repeating the message and adding one more word:

child points to “juice”

you point and verbalize: “more + juice; “like + juice”,…
Teach language

by modeling phrases and sentences…
(good +___; I + don’t + like + ___; go + ___ )

…during real-life interactions
(having snack, watching TV, reading a book,...)
Support practice with family and friends to gradually build an **AAC friendly community**
...and remember,

“If we don’t model what we are trying to teach, then we really are teaching something else”
References


• Make a Real Choice! – Dr. Caroline Ramsey Musselwhite, 2012

• Strategies for Implementing Core Vocabulary with Children using AAC Systems – Gail M. Van Tatenhove, April 2014


• How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014
• AAC: Don’t Demand Prerequisite Skills – www.janefarral.com

• Do’s and Don’ts of AAC: Pulling It All Together – www.janefarral.com

• What is “Beginning AAC” – www.janefarral.com

• Teaching Learners with Multiple Special Needs - Kate Ahern Teachinglearnerswithmultiplespecialneeds.blogspot.ca

• Partner – Assisted Communication Strategies for Children Who Face Multiple Challenges – Linda Burkhart and Gayle Porter; ISAAC 2006

• Parent-mediated intervention versus no intervention for infants at high risk of autism: a parallel, single-blind, randomised trial – J. Green et All; The Lancet Psychiatry Journal, Feb. 2015

• Dynamic Assessment in Early Intervention: Advancing early signals in children with significant motor impairment – P. Dowden et All; ISAAC 2012
Thank-you!

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Communicating with Ava
Presented by: Jennifer Facchinelli

From one parent to another:
Strategies to use with your non-verbal child
Rett Syndrome

• Affects 1:10000 female and sometimes male live births
• Individuals were thought to have very low cognitive function
• Eyegaze computers (Tobii) are proving that many individuals with Rett do not have significant cognitive delay
• Many children who were in main stream classes are now showing they can read and write
5 Key Strategies

• Interact/React
• Model, model, model
• Motivate
• Presume and Assume Competence
• Teach literacy skills
For every interaction there must be a disproportionate reaction!

- Engage your child in conversation in a variety of different settings
- Be a ‘detective’ and look for any attempt to communicate (no matter how miniscule it may be)
- React and respond to any interaction
- Be a ‘meaning maker’ when using a high tech device
The best way to teach is by example

• Modelling communication means doing it yourself
• How do typically developing babies learn language?
• Be age appropriate
• Have high expectations for yourself - not your child
“I can resist anything except temptation” ~ Oscar Wilde

- Find something of interest to talk about (hint: probably not what you find interesting)
- This may be hard so... Keep looking.
- Age appropriate (three year olds like bubbles, sixteen year olds... maybe not)
- Don’t be a dud: keep the mood light, be silly, make sure everyone involved is having fun (including you!)
- Model and react
Don’t doubt it

• Presuming competence means believing your child can do it
• Assume that any communication (on or off device) is INTENTIONAL and eventually it will be
• Be openminded and ignore the nay-sayers
• “If you don’t believe in your kid, nobody else will” ~Simone Chalifoux Picard
A little experiment (and the evolution of my approach)

Scenario: Someone has presented you a cookie

Talk about it these words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cookie</th>
<th>Juice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Cookie" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Juice" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toy</th>
<th>potty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Toy" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="potty" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now try

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>Like</th>
<th>have</th>
<th>not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>Eat</td>
<td>Drink</td>
<td>yummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want</td>
<td>Cookie</td>
<td>different</td>
<td>yucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>wow</td>
<td>All Done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Try again

- Robust communication system with core vocabulary, 800 preprogrammed words, ability to add to each category
Last one...
“Present a kid a choice, they will choose. Give a kid core words, they will talk about it. Provide access to a robust communication system, they will communicate. Teach them literacy skills, they will ask you what took so long” ~ Me
Lets start at the very beginning (a very good place to start)

• READ, READ, READ...READ
• Letter play, Phonemic Awareness (letter sounds), words in everyday encounters, lots of conversation from lots of people
• Four Blocks method (shared/guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, working with words)
• Road may be (very) different but the end goal (result!) is the same
Include Me!

By: Sherry Caldwell

Ashley’s story; forming friendship and building a supportive community.
It is hard but POSSIBLE

Never Give UP

“If my child fails to learn to communicate effectively it is not that she could not learn. It is me who failed to teach her.”

It takes a village – We need help!
Bring on the FRIENDS

• Be the hostess.

• Keep it simple. Pizza & potluck

• Parents and kids will both relax enjoy and reciprocate the invite!

• These friendships can grow into birthday invites, movie dates, walks to park, and endless social opportunities. Meaningful friendship.
Community

We needed to practice with other AAC users! I needed partnering strategies and reminders!

Reach out to your community, CTC, Library or you're municipal recreational Centre's. Bring them ideas that have a common mission.

Ex. My daughter loves books and needs to learn literacy. I approached the Richmond Hill library to create an AAC story hour. Our Children’s Treatment Centre’s and municipal governments want to better serve our kids they don't always know how. They have funds and resources.

You can work together to make this happen in your community.

I just asked! Now York region libraries run regularly a "I can tell a story too" library hour for AAC user every fall and spring. It is FREE, accessible, fun for the kids and encouraging and supportive for the parents that attend.

If the person you’re talking to says NO you’re just talking to the wrong person.
On-line support and encouragement

PrACCTicalacc.org

facebook group - ACC Through Motivate, Model and Move Out of the way!

facebook group - Parents of Proquo2go Users

facebook group - AAC Alternative Awesome Communitors

AACgirls.blogspot.com

Uncommon Sense blog ~ niederfamily.blogspot.com

teachinglearnerswithmultipleneeds.blogspot.ca

www.speakforyourself.org

cdacanada.com
Tips for AAC at School

• The school needs to understand a child’s communication device/book is like a child’s eye glasses always on and available to them. ~Deborah Thomas OT

• Ask AAC questions in your child’s HOME/SCHOOL communication book. Give them updates about what your child’s communicating about at home.

• I recommend making it your child’s #1 IEP goal.

• Don’t be afraid to point it out if your child’s device is coming home unused or you feel there is not enough focus on AAC.

• Share resources and tips on AAC with your child’s school.

Attach AAC tips to your child’s device

Photo credit: Gwendolyn Strong Foundation.