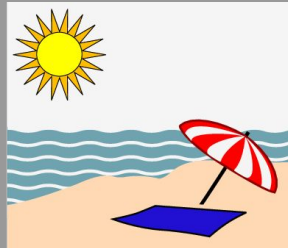# Creating Communication Partners:
AAC for Community Providers

Melinda Simon, MS, CCC-SLP

Communication happens everywhere, so children need to take their AAC everywhere and find communication partners!

Why is it hard for *all* children to communicate?

- Learning new words.
- Remembering vocabulary.
- Putting longer sentences together.
- Understanding new 'concepts' (colors, sizes, shapes, verbs etc.).
- Using language socially: for example making requests and sharing information.
- Using language across different settings.

What can we do to support students with communication difficulties?

We use AAC!

# Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC)

Augmentative:

Supports or enhances the communication a person already has.

This could include a child who has spoken language, but is very hard to understand.

Alternative:

When spoken communication is not effective or available a different type of communication method is used

AAC can be **temporary** or **permanent** and is crucial to language development!
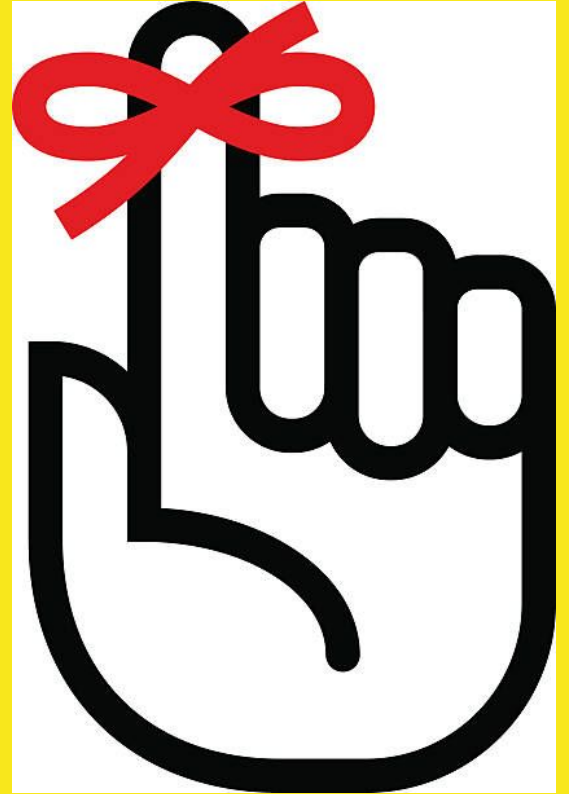
AAC you may see: Light Tech

- Core Communication Boards

- Picture Exchange Binders
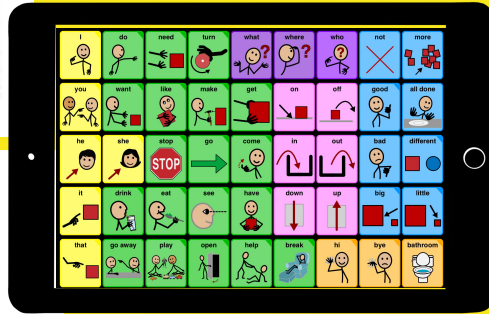
- Signs (ASL)

- Eye gaze boards

AAC you may see: Mid-Tech

- Go Talks
- Switches

AAC you may see: High Tech

- iPad communication devices (Proloquo, LAMP, and others)

- Dedicated Communication system like Accent or TouchChat

- Eye gaze system

Why does it seem difficult for *AAC users* to communicate?

- Ignored because they don't speak
- Hard to get someone's attention
- Takes time to create a message
- Assumption of lack of intelligence
- Not the typical communication interaction
- Limited topics of conversation
- Communicate with the device and not the person

Communication Partners in the Community

Communication partners are the people around the AAC user, who will interact with them.

Anyone can be a communication partner. We can all have a role in supporting AAC, as this is an important job.

Communication partners need to build their skills to support and interact with AAC users.

How can I be an effective communication partner?

Talk with the Child

Greet the child and get down on their level.

Allow them an opportunity to respond in their own way.

Often we talk to the parents, and overlook the communication abilities a child using AAC can offer.

Although a child is using AAC, they are still able to communicate.

Talk to the Child

Use slow and clear speech.

Give a child choices to help them feel in control of the situation.

If the child is shy, stay calm and speak to them in a kind and steady voice.

Try to make a connection with the child.

Be Flexible = Accept All Forms of Communication

Often, AAC users will choose the fastest and most efficient means of communication available to them in the moment.

Good communication partners accept that AAC users communicate using different ways, not just their communication device. AAC users may use a combination of vocalizations, words, word approximations, pointing to pictures or photos or objects, sign language, natural gestures, body language, and facial expressions, as well as their AAC system.

Presume Competence

Just because a child is using an AAC device does not mean, they do not have something to say.

Everyone has something to say. Every person has ideas on the inside. This is there, regardless of how they appear to the outside observer. Assume that they understand what is being said.
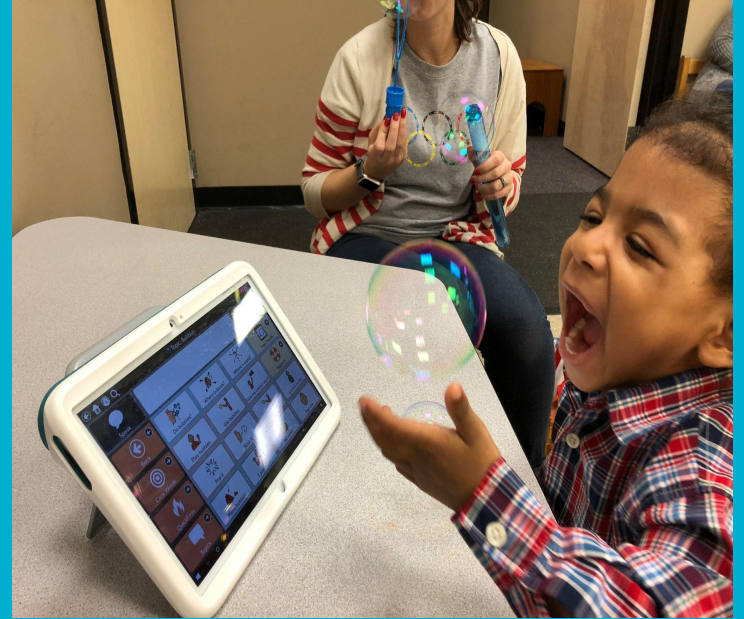
Accept All Forms of Communication

AAC learners use their AAC systems in real conversations but they also point, vocalize, speak, and use facial expressions to communicate.

# Make sure an AAC system is accessible at all times

The AAC system is their voice and cannot be taken away.

If you are ever tempted to take an AAC system away, ask yourself,

"What would I do if this child was verbal?"

Alternative Methods

In some situations a high tech communication devices may not be available. Be ready for the child and have an alternative way for the child to communicate. If you are unsure what that maybe or do not have one available, contact the child's parents, caregivers, or SLP.
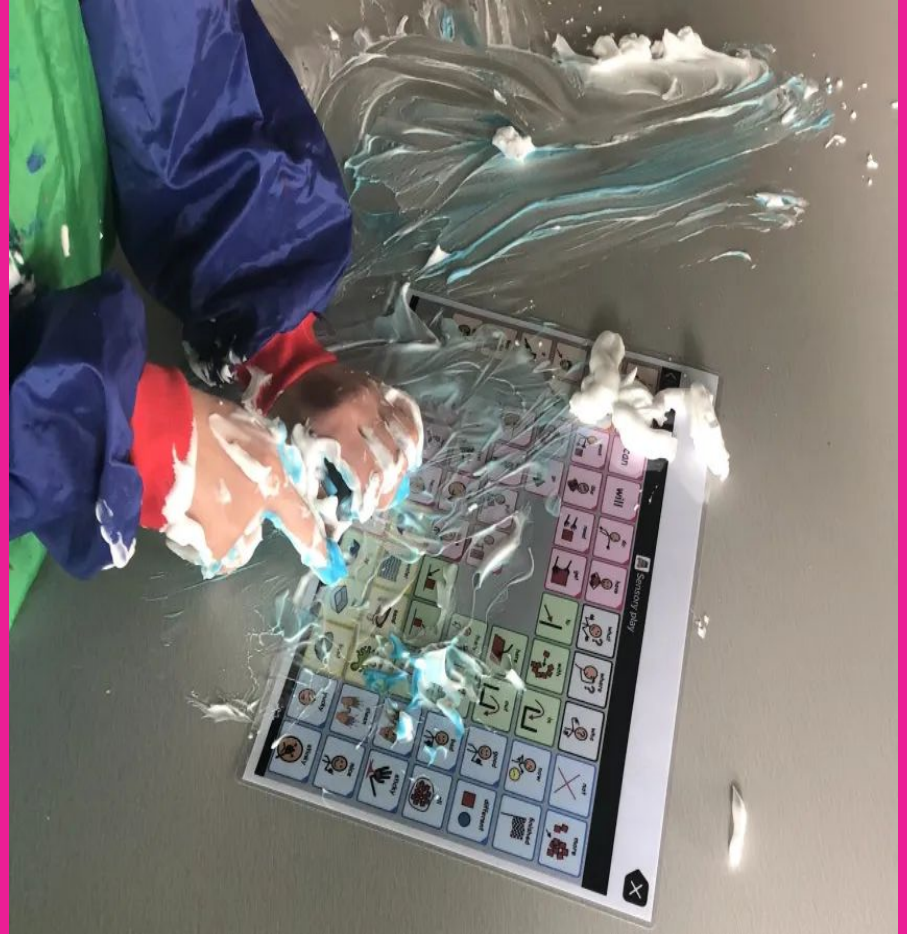
Adjust Your Message

For beginning communicators, use language one level up from where they are.

If a child uses one word, use 2-3 words with the child.

If you want the child to follow directions, give the directions in one step and wait between steps

Meet the child where they are.

WAIT

Waiting is hard.

Children using AAC or children with language processing difficulties, might need extra time to comprehend the message and form a response.

And wait some more

Try to count to 5 before responding.

Make sure to schedule enough time with a child that has known communication impairments to allow for extra wait time.

Always Attribute Meaning

There are 2 main ways we can give meaning to the communication our students are using.

We can try to label their actions and behaviors, validating their communication!

We can also respond purposefully and respectfully to ALL their communication attempts.

AssistiveWare
Amanda's AAC Advice:
Attributing meaning

AssistiveWare
Amanda's AAC Advice:
Attributing meaning

Remember, we aren't mind readers! Even if you are sure a child has "incorrectly" activated a button, continue to attribute meaning to what they did say!

WHAT TO DO WHEN A CHILD MAKES A "MISTAKE" ON THEIR AAC DEVICE

Why Attributing Meaning is Important:

1. It sends a message of respect and value for their communication.

2. It helps students learn what words or phrases mean in specific contexts.

3. It encourages students to use their AAC systems.

Benefits to Communication

- Respected child who feels like they have been listened to
- Better results as the AAC user has had a voice in the discussion
- Smoother interactions
- More accurate response of child's feelings
- Increased child safety

When going out, everyone needs to be responsible for the AAC!

Parents can also assign someone to be the AAC monitor! Their job is to:

- Make sure the AAC device is always available

- Talk to the AAC user not about the AAC user.

- Help the AAC user choose the best form of communication for the situation!

- Make sure the AAC device leaves the location.

Where will you see AAC?
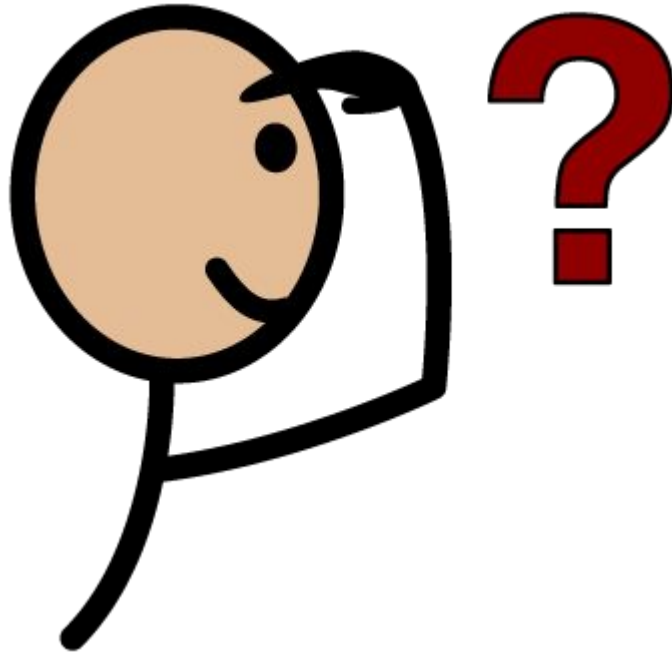
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