AAC & Autism
An Introduction to a few Fundamentals

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Agenda

• What is AAC?
  • Mythbusting

• ASD & Communication
  • How can AAC help?
  • What can we do at home?

• Resources
Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

• “AAC is an area of clinical practice ... for [individuals with] impairments in speech-language production and/or comprehension...

• “AAC falls under the broader umbrella of assistive technology...to improve functional daily living...

• “AAC uses a variety to techniques and tools to help individuals express thoughts, wants, needs, feelings and ideas”

Elsahar et al., 2019; asha.org

Mythbuster #1: AAC is MORE than just high tech

• REALITY: Communication is the exchange of ideas and information

• High technology speech generating devices (i.e., computers that talk) are just one of many AAC solutions.

• We can also communicate through:
  • Pointing, gestures, facial expressions, body language, objects, drawing/pictures

• One is not better than the other.
Mythbuster #2

• **MYTH:** iPads are as other high tech AAC solutions.
  • At a cheaper cost,
  • And without the wait!

• **REALITY:** Practical and functional differences exist between speech generating devices (SGDs) that are considered durable medical equipment, and iPads used as SGDs.

Mythbuster #3: AAC will **Not** Prevent Speech

• There are often concerns that the use of AAC tools and strategies will prevent an individual from developing and/or using speech.

• Research shows this to be **untrue** (Millar, Light & Schlosser, 2006; Schlosser & Wendt, 2008; Leech & Cress, 2011)
  • Some evidence suggests the opposite, but needs further investigation.

• AAC provides individuals with access to language and opportunities for language development that are otherwise not available (Barker, et al., 2014; Romski & Sevcik, 2005; Romski, et al., 2010; Smith, Barton-Hulsey, & Nwosu, 2016)
ASD & Communication: What we know

• Individuals with ASD can have a range of symptoms that impact communication.

• Some examples include:
  • Delays in the development of spoken language
  • Appropriateness of functional verbal and nonverbal behaviors (limited use)
  • Impaired social/emotional reciprocity, trouble understanding feelings

ASD & Communication: What we know

• With limited communication skills, individuals can develop unconventional, undesirable, or ineffective behaviors to communicate

• A common goal from AAC clinicians is to increase behaviors that are helpful and to decrease behaviors that are harmful/ineffective.

• We do so by seeking to augment existing communication, and/or provide alternatives to non-functional communicative behaviors
ASD & Communication: How can AAC help?

• With AAC we provide individuals the tools to LEARN:
  • The nature of communication is built on reciprocity and turn taking
  • That symbols have meaning and can be more effective at getting a point across.
  • Appropriate social affective signals (e.g., I’m anxious, I don’t feel well, I’m happy)

What can we do at home?

• Provide access to, model the use of, and develop external symbols that represent Core + Fringe Vocabulary
  • CORE: Pronouns, verbs, auxillary verbs, prepositions, adjectives, determiners
    • Most frequently used words in our vocabulary
    • Can be used across environments
  • FRINGE: Nouns, places, names, people
    • Environment specific—infrequently used outside environment
    • Consider giving access to functional words specific to individual
What can we do at home?

- When the individual attempts to communicate, NOTICE! RESPOND!
  - Gives the child incentive to do it again, Make language *exciting*.
- Increase experiences with a variety of communicative functions
  - Not just labelling, or requesting
- Increase in morphology and syntax development
- Support individual to maintain a conversation for 2+ turns

Resources for More Info & Ideas

**Wisconsin AT/AAC resources:**
- [https://dpi.wi.gov/sped/educators/consultation/assistive-technology/at-forward](https://dpi.wi.gov/sped/educators/consultation/assistive-technology/at-forward)
- [https://atmapping.cesa2.org](https://atmapping.cesa2.org)
- [https://www.waisman.wisc.edu/echo/echo-aac/](https://www.waisman.wisc.edu/echo/echo-aac/)

**General AAC Resources:**
- [https://practicalaac.org](https://practicalaac.org)
- [https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/aac/](https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/aac/)
- [https://aackids.psu.edu/index.php/page/show/id/1/](https://aackids.psu.edu/index.php/page/show/id/1/)
- [https://rerc-aac.psu.edu](https://rerc-aac.psu.edu)

**Communication inventory tools:**
- [https://www.communicationmatrix.org](https://www.communicationmatrix.org)

**Core word list resource:** [https://aactoolbox.com/materials/100highfrequencycorewords21.pdf](https://aactoolbox.com/materials/100highfrequencycorewords21.pdf)