

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

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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

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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.

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Mythbuster #2

- **MYTH:** iPads are the 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.

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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)

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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

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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

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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)

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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

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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

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Resources for More Info & Ideas

Wisconsin AT/AAC resources:

- <https://dpi.wi.gov/sped/educators/consultation/assistive-technology/at-forward>
- <https://atmapping.cesa2.org>
- <https://www.waisman.wisc.edu/echo/echo-aac/>

General AAC Resources:

- <https://practicalaac.org>
- <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/aac/>
- <https://aackids.psu.edu/index.php/page/show/id/1/>
- <https://rerc-aac.psu.edu>

Communication inventory tools:

- <http://icfcy.org/uploads/csicy.pdf>
- <https://www.communicationmatrix.org>

Core word list resource: <https://aclanguelab.com/materials/100highfrequencycorewords21.pdf>

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