

Closing The Gap

Solutions

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Picture That!

Using Visual Supports to Increase Emotional Competence and Reframe Challenging Behaviors in Individuals with Disabilities

Summary: Imagine a day in the life of an individual who is unable to share their wants and needs, or communicate and regulate their emotions. Incorporating appropriate communication-based approaches supports effective means to communicate wants, needs and feelings. Every individual regardless of ability or disability has emotions that should be honored. Researchers agree that changes in emotion-processing impacts the severity of challenging behavior. This article uses visual supports to improve emotional competence and reframe challenging behaviors.

Over the past 12 years practicing as a speech language pathologist who specializes in communication-based approaches to challenging behaviors I have seen and felt my share of challenging behaviors. My perspective on challenging behaviors continues to grow and change, in hopes that I can provide better services but also be more understanding and compassionate towards individuals who use behavior to communicate emotions, wants and needs. We all use some sort of behavior to communicate our desires and how we feel. We all funnel our emotions into thoughts or actions, some more appropriate than others, but all of which are expressed in the manner we want to express them. For individuals with complex disabilities or intellectual disabilities, that ability might require more support in the form of assistive devices, visual scales, visual pictures, speech generating devices or other forms of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

AAC includes all the different ways in which we communicate other than speaking. Individuals of all ages use AAC when spoken language is difficult. We use forms of AAC all the time without realizing it. We might text someone, share emojis, look at a map, write a note, use a facial expression that says more than words ever could, among other things. According to the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), "Augmentative means to add to someone's speech. Alternative means to be used instead of speech. Some people use AAC throughout their life. Others may use AAC only for a short time, like when they have surgery and can't talk." This article will focus on using AAC strategies to enhance emotional competence for individuals with disabilities.



LISA BECCERA-WALKER is a speech language pathologist with over 10 years' experience in autism and related disorders across the life span of individuals on the spectrum. Lisa is also the program director for TEAM MARIO, a non-profit autism awareness organization in the lower Rio Grande Valley. Lisa has provided training for school districts, law enforcement organizations, companies, and non-profit organizations in the areas of autism awareness, autism in the workplace, challenging behavior and communication, AAC, and social skills training. She has authored peer reviewed articles in the Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals and the Journal of the Texas Associations for the Education of Young Children among others. Recently she has authored a textbook chapter in the area of challenging behavior and AAC. Lisa has also participated in state, national, and international research presentations and looks forward to making a difference in the lives of individuals with all abilities. She is currently a doctoral student at the University of Houston.

A DAY WITHOUT WORDS

Imagine a day in the life of an individual who is unable to share their wants and needs, or communicate and regulate their emotions. Challenging behaviors (CB) that might increase when an individual is unable to communicate. CB can take many forms. They are defined as “culturally abnormal behavior(s) of such intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy, or behavior which is likely to seriously limit use of, or result in the person being denied access to, ordinary community facilities” (Emerson 2002, p. 3).

Incorporating appropriate communication-based approaches promotes more adaptive behaviors and supports effective means to communicate wants, needs and feelings. Desrochers and Fallon (2014) state that an individual with a developmental disability shows functional limitations in “... three or more categories of: self-care, receptive and expressive language, academic learning, mobility, self-direction, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency” (p. 1). Emotional development and language development are partners. Language development allows us the opportunity to understand and label emotions. It is believed that language development and emotional competence are connected. Na et al. (2016) indicate that “there appears to be a link between the development of language and the development of emotional competence in children who use speech but little information is available about these issues in children who rely on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).” (p. 1) Among individuals with language disorders, developmental disabilities and psychiatric disorders, several findings suggest that the severity or frequency of challenging behavior is related to the severity of communication disability. (Caulfield, Fischel, DeBaryshe, & Whithurst, 1989. Walker & Snell 2013; McClintock, Hall & Oliver 2003). It’s reasoned to believe that if communication is impaired it will be more difficult to the individuals communicated their emotions and their wants and needs which will result in challenging behaviors and among those wants and needs.

A HOLISTIC VIEW OF INDIVIDUALS WHO EXHIBIT CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

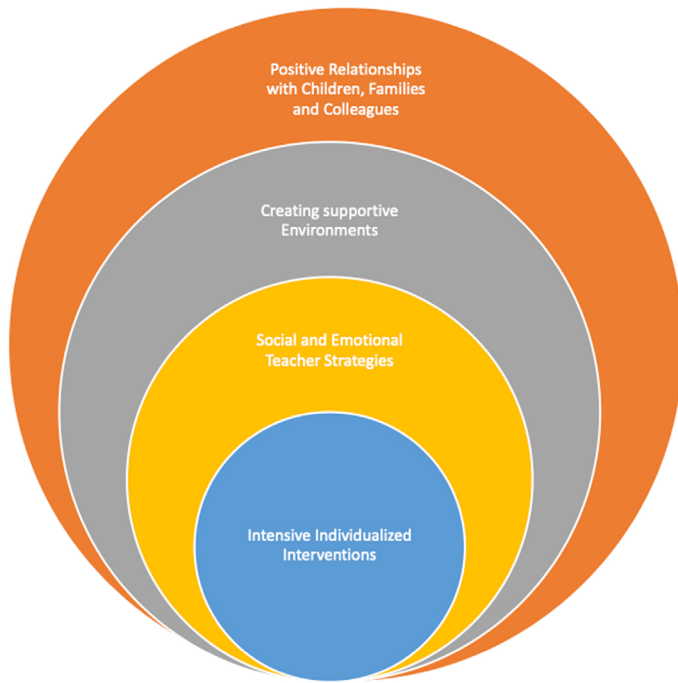
Challenging behaviors are often addressed in terms of behavior function via a variety of behavior modification strategies or applied behavior analysis. It’s easy to see a behavior that needs to be changed, modified and extinguished instead of the actual individual. Often times generalized statements regarding the individual’s behavior, purpose and even attitude are seen from a negative perspective. Reactive statements such as “He’s spoiled,” “She doesn’t understand,” “He can’t do anything,” and “She attacked me” are biased in nature and often lead to low expectations and low outcomes. Proactive statements such as “Let’s try a different approach,” “Let’s see what I can do to help,” and “How can I make this better?” are unbiased and lead to better expectations and outcomes.

To set expectations high, one must see an individual who exhibits challenging behavior as a whole. In doing so, we look beyond the challenging behavior to a child or adult with purpose, emotions, and the right to communicate. When looking at an individual, we take into consideration their emotional development as a foundational part of understanding the person. Barret (2017) states that “...our emotions aren’t built-in, waiting to be revealed. They are made. By us. We don’t recognize emotions or identify emotions: we construct our own emotional experiences, and our perceptions of others’ emotions, on the spot, as needed, through a complex interplay of systems. Human beings are not at the mercy of mythical emotion circuits buried deep within animalistic parts of our highly evolved brain: we are architects of our own experience.” Every individual regardless of ability or disability has emotions that should be honored. Researchers agree that changes in emotion-processing such as “difficulties in perception, recognition, understanding, expression, and regulation of emotions could be found in ASD... Hence, the quality and severity of challenging behavior may depend not only on intellectual but also on emotional skills changing over a lifetime. The effect of the overall emotional development (ED) on challenging behavior has not yet been examined in individuals with ID.” (Sappok et al., 2013) While this area of research is still being developed, emotional development plays an important role in treating individuals with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviors with dignity and respect.

ENHANCING COMMUNICATION-BASED APPROACHES TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

Communication-based approaches considers communication issues in the assessment and intervention processes. Communication-based approaches can have an emphasis on behavioral intervention, involve assessing the form as well as the functions of the behavior, and subsequently replacing the challenging behavior by teaching an appropriate alternative behavior that serves the same communicative function and, in turn, affords the individual an opportunity to communicate appropriately. Unfortunately, emotional development is not often at the forefront of teaching the replacement of challenging behaviors. Considerations for emotional development are often overlooked, however using communication-based approaches to increase emotional competence can enhance the understanding of emotions and decrease challenging behaviors in children who use AAC. Corso (2007) illustrates an important framework for promoting social-emotional development and preventing and addressing challenging behavior. The framework is structured with the importance of positive relationships with children, family and colleagues as the foundation, followed by creating supportive environments, social and emotional teaching strategies, and intensive individualized interventions. The following figure illustrates is adapted from Corso (2007) the





Framework for promoting social-emotional development and preventing and addressing challenging behavior, adapted from Corso (2007)

way the framework builds off of each area respectively:

Strategies within this framework include: “describing, modeling, rehearsing, role-playing, prompting children in naturalistic contexts, and reinforcing and acknowledging the skill when it occurs.” (Corso, 2007, p.53). These strategies can be used for AAC users in the following way:

1. Learn the concept: The AAC user is introduced to “what it means to be happy” via a photograph of an individual that is good friends playing a game (i.e., “He’s happy because he’s playing a game with his friends.”)
2. Practice the skill: the AAC user can practice during their day (e.g., during lunch time, recess, or other times when children might be happy). Educators or clinicians can introduce the concept, model the skill, or engage in role-playing during class. (i.e., “I’m so happy they’re serving pizza at lunch because that’s the favorite!” (model for AAC user on device)
3. Have opportunities to view and talk about examples and non-examples of the skill: The AAC user discusses with teacher (or clinician) when they feel happy using their speech generating device. Allow for opportunities to reciprocate information: teacher can state I feel so (mad, tired, happy etc.) because _____. (pause, model on device the carrier phrase “I feel” and wait to see if AAC user completes statement or shares his/her own feelings).

In the event that the child continues to exhibit challenging behavior, intensive individualized interventions might be warranted through positive behavior supports. These types of support plans could be used in academic and home environments. Corso (2007) defines this approach: “intensive

and individualized refers to the use of a process that requires teaming among classroom staff and family members to design an intervention plan that is based on understanding of the individual child, the environmental factors that relate to the child’s problem behavior, and the child’s strengths and needs” (p. 53).

USING EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE TO BRIDGE THE COMMUNICATION GAP

Na et al. (2016) argue that “that supporting communication about emotions is as important for children who use AAC as it is for children who are learning speech.” While research in the area of emotional competence for children with disabilities is encouraging, there isn’t research in the field of emotional competence specifically for AAC users who use aided AAC. AAC has the capacity to connect emotional competence with effective communication skills. For individuals who rely solely on AAC or who have limited oral speech, there are limited opportunities for supporting communication about emotions. AAC has the capacity to enhance opportunities to share. AAC users are often at risk for delayed development of emotional competence “due to factors intrinsic to the child as well as challenges imposed by AAC systems, the context, and task demands. Factors intrinsic to the child might include (a) difficulty communicating using language; (b) difficulty expressing emotions because of physical, motor, or cognitive challenges; and (c) difficulty interacting with people and the environment. Extrinsic factors include (a) partners’ difficulty interpreting gestures and/or facial expression, (b) partners’ low awareness of the need to address emotional development, (c) myths about AAC and users of AAC, and (d) technology limitations.” (p. 5)

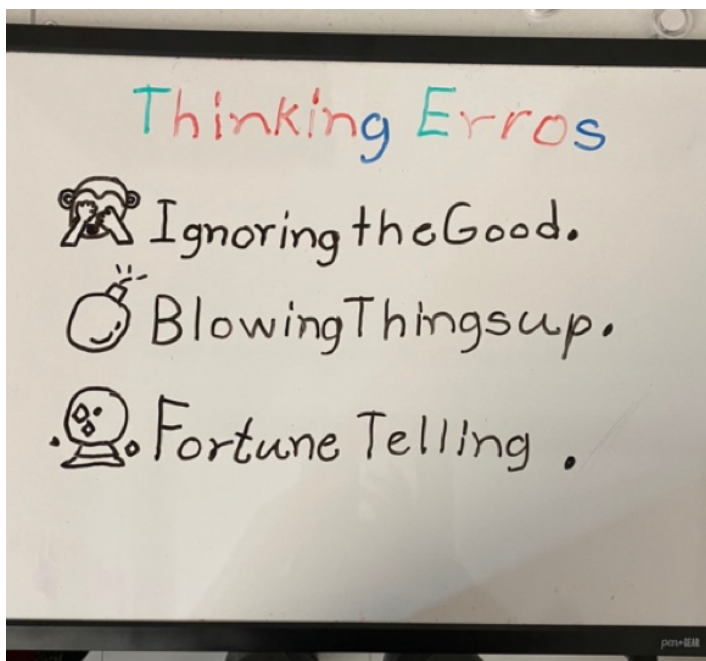
Using robust communication systems that depict a variety of emotions and emotion-related communication tools and self-regulation functions have the capacity to give AAC users a means to share emotion related vocabulary. The following table depicts samples of using emotion-related communication tools with an AAC system or strategy:

Emotion-related communication tools	Samples	AAC system or strategy
Interpersonal functions	“I am there if you need me.”	Speech generating device that allows for generating spontaneous novel utterances
Descriptive functions	“I feel terrible.”	5-point scale [®] that depicts level of emotions so individual can understand better, choose level or an AAC device with a robust emotion choices.
Self-regulation functions	“I need a minute, I’m thinking”	Including buttons on AAC user’s device with appropriate messages and ensure that those speaking to AAC users respect the individuals need for time to process thoughts and feels

The following scale was used in an 8 year olds room during remote learning instruction to redirect challenging behavior and task avoidance. His wall had expectations, behavior maps and a 5 point scale



5 point scale with emotions and strategies



Not pictured dry erase board child drew with "thinking errors" discussed in a previous session to help regulate his emotions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THINKING IN PICTURES

Visual supports can improve expressive and receptive communication skills for individuals and decrease challenging behavior with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related disorders. Time and time again visuals are used in a variety of studies to assess emotions. Maccari et al. (2014) assessed whether emotional stimuli affected visual search abilities in children with autism. The researchers chose 6 negative, 6 neutral, and 6 positive pictures but not all pictures contained faces. Results indicated "that children with ASD have better visual search abilities than [typical developing] children only when the search is particularly difficult and requires strong serial search strategies. The emotional social impairment that is usually considered as a typical feature of ASD seems to be limited to processing of negative emotional information" (p. 2871). Emotional scenes are aimed at studying the relationship between visual search and emotion. When turning emotional scenes into vehicles for learning they can be paired with visual supports that will increase understanding of both positive and negative emotions. Experts agree that visual supports are successful for individuals with ASD and related disorders because these individuals tend to process visual information more efficiently than auditory information.



USING VISUAL SCENES TO COMMUNICATE EMOTIONS

The area of visual scene displays (VSDs) is relatively new and continues to be explored and honed. Their potential to enhance visual and cognitive processing continues to expand. Wilkinson et al. (2012) explain VSDs as: “representations of concepts are embedded in a full or integrated scene. This means that the entire image of the scene – whether a digital photograph, scanned image, or schematic line drawing – contains multiple concepts within it” (p.137). For instance, if the image depicts a child swimming in a pool, the vocabulary surrounding the event is programmed into the visual scene under “hotspots”:

- Touching the water of the pool could result as the synthesized speech device to say “pool” or “wet”
- Touching the child in the pool could trigger “swim” or “boy”
- If incorporating emotional development, touching the boy’s face in the pool could trigger the word “happy”

VSDs are not restricted to “communicating a single message or communicative intent. Rather, it is a milieu through which individuals might communicate multiple messages or intents” (p. 138) While bridging VSDs and emotional development has yet to be fully researched or reviewed, there is a strong potential for using VSDs as a tool to increase emotional competence and decrease challenging behaviors. Possible pairings of VSD with speech generating devices is illustrated below and would include:

- VSD of individual baking
- Robust communication device (LAMP: Words for Life communication application)
- Access to a myriad of words that can express feeling of displeasure, engagement, excitement or anything novel that the individual would like to express.

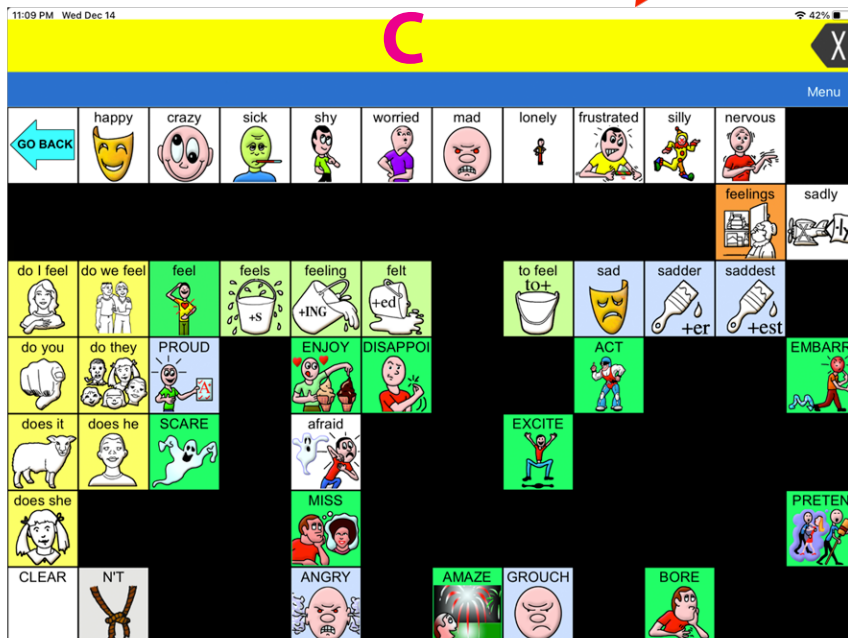
A



B



C



It is important to keep VSD content “motivating, meaningful, and relevant to the children with complex communication needs who use them. Even a display that is perfect in visual composition will be limited in functionality if its content is irrelevant or unmotivating.” (Wilkinson et al., 2012, p. 145) For instance the screen shot depicted consists of a zoom session with an AAC user who has very limited spoken utterances. He uses an ACCENT 1000 with LAMP: Words for Life, sign language and simple words/phrases. At the time of session he showed aggression towards mother and was very upset. Mother was unable to calm him down and figure out why he was upset and challenging behavior was increasing. I logged onto session, created a visual schedule (list on the left side) and reviewed that he shouldn't be hurting his mom's finger (list in the center). I also proceeded to figure out way he was upset. My simple visual scene consisted of an angry stick figure and guessing what he was saying and then drawing it out. I drew a fish but he corrected me by saying “noodles” “elephant” so I drew noodles and an elephant. I realized he was describing his favorite restaurant and asked if he was hungry and he responded yes. He wanted his mom to tell him that he could have P.F. Chang's because he was hungry but he didn't know how and he got upset. I typed out the statement he wanted to say and he read it to mom. Mom said “yes” to P.F. Chang's and student was calm and completed the session.

There is great potential of using VSDs to enhance emotional competence and decrease challenging behavior in individuals who have challenging behaviors or use AAC to communicate. While research in the area continues to be limited the excitement for what lies ahead and the possibilities are endless.

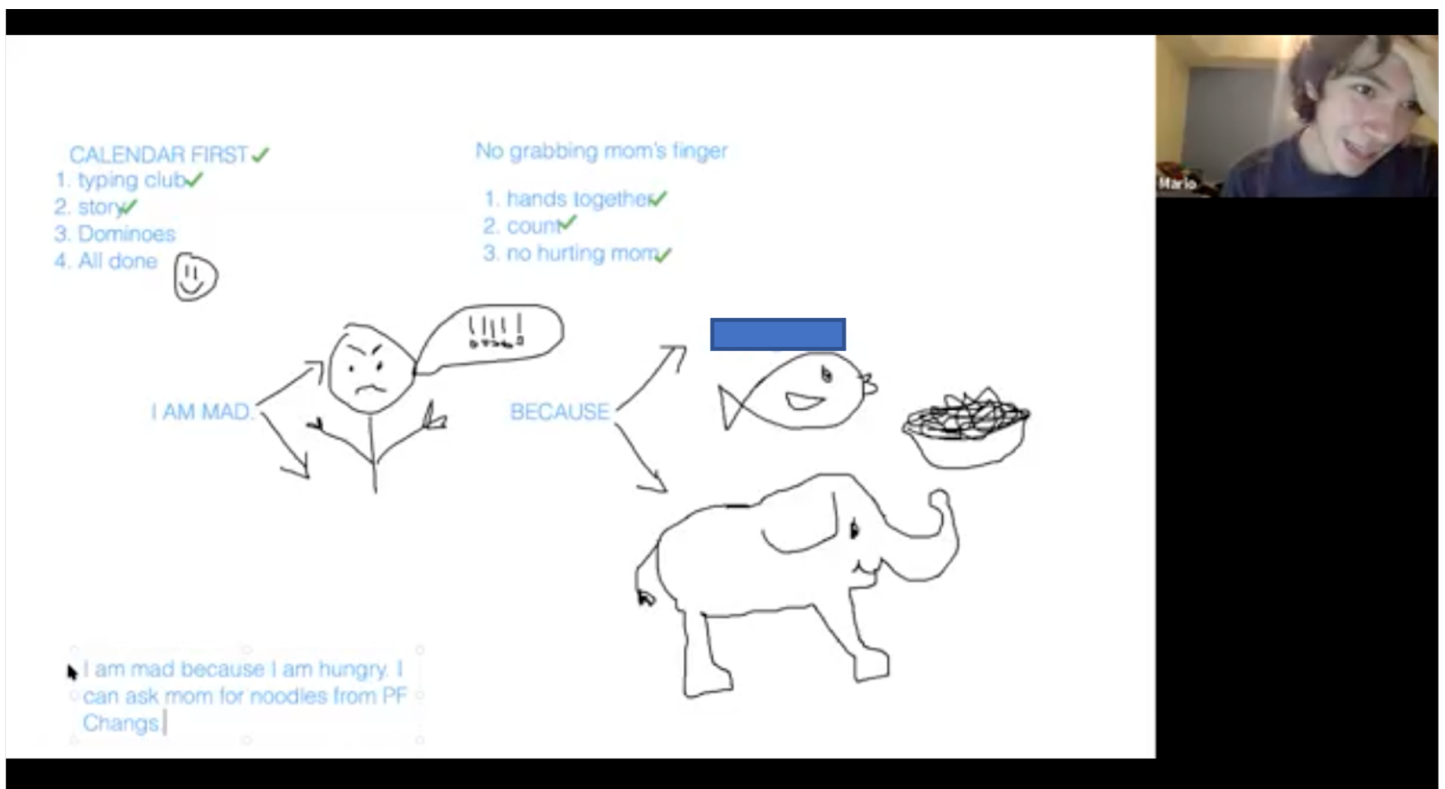
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What Does the Research Say About the Effectiveness of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)?

By Dave Edyburn

Thursday April 6, 2023

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm (Central Daylight Time)

Universal design for learning (UDL) is often a key component of inclusive education. That is, services for students with disabilities participating in the general education classroom experience UDL in order to support their academic, behavioral, and social success. However, despite the policy support for UDL service delivery models, to-date there has been little research about the efficacy of UDL.

A newly published meta-analysis study analyzing 20 recent research studies provides new insight about the research effectiveness of UDL. The purpose of this webinar is to provide participants with a guided tour of this important research in order to understand its implications for local UDL programming. Previous research experience is not required to participate in this webinar. Emphasis will be placed on the practical application of research evidence (rather than the statistical analysis and interpretation).



Inclusion, Accessibility and Alternative Access in the Preschool Classroom

By Mary Katherine Dally

Thursday, April 13, 2023

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm (Central Daylight Time)

Preschool is the first structured learning opportunity for most students. Preschool learning experiences include pretend play during centers, pre-literacy and writing skills, social interaction on the playground and following a curriculum during circle time, among others. For students with complex bodies and complex communication needs, these everyday opportunities and learning experiences within the preschool classroom can be impacted by accessibility.

Throughout this webinar, experience ideas to increase accessibility for preschool students, supporting multiple access methods in the classroom such as switch access, partner assisted scanning, eye gaze and tactile learning

for visual impairments. We will discuss how to interpret and support a total communication approach by assigning meaning to play and communication for some of our youngest learners. Come experience and discuss opportunities for alternative access methods to be embedded within pretend play centers, during playground time, within reading and writing centers and circle time with the ultimate focus for inclusion. This webinar will incorporate ideas to design your own accessible areas within the preschool classroom using every day, common items based on student needs.



Pairing Core Vocabulary With Shared Reading For Early Language & Literacy Success!

By Deidre Dobbels

Thursday, April 27, 2023

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm (Central Daylight Time)

Young children with communication impairments are at risk for a variety of difficulties including: frustration, aggression, decreased problem solving skills, withdrawal, resistance to new experiences and delayed literacy development. Nearly 10% of preschoolers will present with a communication disorder between the ages 3-6. It is no longer considered best practice to “wait and see” if a child needs Augmentative and Alternative Communication support or tools, and research has confirmed that utilizing AAC will not stunt or negatively impact future verbal skills. With increased access to AAC supports from low-tech to high-tech, as well as access to a plethora of free supports, AAC must be explored early on in a child’s experience.

This presentation will begin by identifying crucial early language and literacy milestones. It will then move into the appropriateness of utilizing core vocabulary to ignite language skills in non or minimally speaking preschoolers. Participants will be encouraged to utilize core boards provided in the resources to frame every day interactions, allowing them to provide verbal and visual input to communicators using aided language stimulation. The practice of shared reading will be presented and the benefits to the approach especially for students who lack language, engagement and experiences. Participants will learn and practice using the “Follow the CAR...” scaffold as well as putting the “CROWD in the CAR” techniques to building interest, knowledge and language exposure. Finally, the premise of using core vocabulary to engage in shared reading will be explored and demonstrated. This strategy can easily be taught to caregivers and educators new to core vocabulary, be woven into already existing school/daycare and home routines and simultaneously target two important developmental skills.

Participants will observe videos of the combined practice, have opportunities to plan out their own core based shared reading experiences and leave with a plethora of resources to support the practice. This workshop will provide communication partners with the information, practice and resources they need to use this practice in their classrooms, living rooms and therapy rooms!

REGISTER NOW!

How We Can Support Students Who Use AAC In Life Skills Program

My last paper was about inclusion, but inclusion isn't for everyone who uses AAC. That is what we're going to be discussing in this paper, the students who might need more one-on-one, more help, and more outside of the box thinking. I want first to talk about which students that we will be discussing. Note this is my own thoughts and beliefs about it and I welcome other people's thoughts and beliefs about this. If the student is having a hard time with following directions and or behaviors that might impact the regular classroom then the team needs to think about putting the student in a self contained classroom. Note, this is a team discussion and family members need to share their input on this and they should have the final say.

Who does not remember your kindergarten year? I know I do, like it was yesterday!! Everyone doesn't know what this school thing is all about, we were still learning what our life will be like for the next 13 to 24 years. When I was starting out in kindergarten, the first thing that I learned about wasn't my ABC or numbers. It was the thing called recess!! This might sound dumb to some, but we need to teach recess to students who have the most cognitive disabilities and are neurodivergent. They don't know about what we are doing outside and how long we get? You might like to teach them what they can do and reminders on how long they have and what is coming up next? Specials are great to have after recesses and lunch.

For children in wheelchairs, power chairs, or scooter it is so important to get them out of the wheelchair or scooter. I have been climbing up the jungle gym and sliding with my peers, because I was a kid. My one on one aide and teacher made sure

that happened everyday when I was little kindergarten to third grade. This allowed my friends to see that I could walk and run, like them. In the winter months, I stayed inside because it was chilly. I had friends to play games with. When I was older I kept the score when my friends were playing sports.

I do think during grade school years, these students should be in their grade classroom most of the day. Grade school is more about modeling behaviors and language more than anything. Really try to have students in their grade school classroom 75 to 95% of the time because everyone needs it. Of course this is good for the student with a disability so they can learn from their friends how to behave, but this is fantastic for students without any disabilities too so they can see and learn about people who have a disability and how to help them. It gives kids the ability to learn that we are all people and not to be afraid. That will bring understanding and acceptance. You can bring work to them when the class will be working on something that way they have something to work on when the class is finishing up their work. When you have time, co-teach with the grade school teacher a lesson or two a month. This is your opportunity to see how they are doing in the classroom and what all of the children are doing and talking about. The day needs to be meaningful, busy, and educational to them.

If you have a student who can't not be in the grade classroom at all, please try anything to make it work. I know of a team where the classroom teacher brought their class to the special education classroom daily and that was where they taught social studies to everyone, and I know of a school in Arizona that



MIKE HIPPLE is a young man with a PHYSICAL disability. He has been using assistive technology and AAC since 1998 to communicate with his family and to move around in the community. He is an active member of the AAC community and his local community. He started Wisconsin AAC Network in 2015 to give everybody a voice in WI AAC AT communities. When he is working on his writings you bet he will have it on the TV or when he is relaxing. He has a membership in the following organizations Wisconsin Greater Autism Society, The United States and the International Society of AAC, and Council of Exceptional Children.

does every classroom in the school and will visit the special education classroom each week. How cool is that? So we have ways around that. When a child is moving on to middle school, it is time to have a discussion with the family on what is the placement that will work best for their child. Family members might have a hard time coming to this and this is understandable. School professionals, you need to understand that this is their child that you are talking about. It isn't a student that you have, they love and care for their child, they hoped their child would go off to college or have a job.

As education professionals, we need to understand that this will be hard for families to be okay with this. Imagine when your child is going into middle school you had someone who said okay I know your child is trying their best, but I feel that it is better for them to start working on life skills. How will you feel at that time? Frustrated? Embarrassed? Or lonely? I think a lot of families feel this way, which is understandable and sad. I had a family tell me this once, you aren't believing in my kid, maybe you had families who told you that too. We need to get families excited and proud for this chapter, because we need their support. Life skills aren't the end of the student's education journey, it is just the start. You might invite parents to an evening to learn about life skills and how it looks in your school district. Make sure that you tell the families that you will rethink the placement of their child every year, because students can change their abilities so quickly. Like I was in a cognitive disability program to start my education because I couldn't communicate and I had a lot of behaviors. In high school I was taking regular education classes but the environment was small.

Now we will be discussing life skills and life AAC skills. Life skills are thinking skills, personnel skills, and interpersonal skills. I will go through each one so we will all know. Thinking skills might be what do you think about that or what do you think will happen or not.

Thinking skills are problem solving like Billy stomping on watermelon what will happen to the watermelon. It also can be I am lost in a store who can I ask. Thinking skills are important to have because we use them everyday to solve problems. For personnel skills, it is all about what can I do to take care of myself. Like brushing my teeth and taking a shower by themselves or asking someone to help them out. Looking at their emails is personal skill and reading social media.

Teamwork is a huge personal life skill and so important to have. The students will always need to have teamwork because they have different people taking care of their needs, they will need to know how to ask nicely for things. Interpersonal life skill is all about communication and that is a huge life skill to have for the students who use AAC. It can be telling someone that I need to go to the bathroom or I need a change please. It can be telling someone that I don't like that please stop or I want to see family. It could include talking to their aide about how they feel or telling someone that something bad happened.

Now, we know the three areas of life skills, it is time to discuss when you can start teaching this. Like everything in special education, it will be different for each student. This is just a guideline for you to think about. The first year of middle school can be getting to know their new environment and for you to get to know them. If they haven't been taught a clear yes and no yet, please consider starting with that, because yes and no questions are so important and key to everyday life. We all ask yes and no questions throughout the day like do you like this song or do you like me to change the channel.

These questions are fast but so important to everyone. If they are ever in an interview with police officers, how do police officers ask most of their questions? That is right they will ask yes and no questions, this is an important life skill to have. Throughout grade school students had recess three or four times a day and middle schools don't have recesses, this might be a little deal for some students or a huge deal. I know when I was looking at my schedule before I started seventh grade, I told my parents and older brother Doug that the school messed up my schedule. I don't have any recesses on here. Doug told me that middle school doesn't have recesses welcome to middle school. I was okay not having recess, I think some of the students who are in the ID or autism program could be a huge deal. So please allow the students to take a walk outside or just be outside during the day. This is a huge change for students, having some things the same as their grade school might help them. Remember that they have been going to the same school for six or seven years.

Of course we can't recess all the way through their education journey, you will need to come up with a plan to shape out recess. Work with their grade school and their family to come up with a plan. I believe the goal should be no recess by January, but everybody is different. The grade school's team has a lot of knowledge about the student's background, likes, what to try when their assistive technology stops, what to try when they are feeling frustrated and sad, and who are their friends. This didn't happen to me. Please allow the student to call or to email their old teachers and aides when they want to if this is okay with their old school. I know that I asked my teacher to call someone at the grade school because the new team didn't understand something.

My new teacher told me no and she didn't need to talk to anyone. And I could tell people what I needed, I can't imagine how hard and frustrating it is without having a communication device. Their first four months of middle school will be hard for everyone. Think back to your first four months of middle school, were they hard for you? Of course they were, now add to it you can't communicate, no one knows your signs, and everyone is trying out new things to see what will work for you. My first four months of middle school were hell. I think I got two or three F on my report card. I was transitioning to middle school and my team was trying to get to know me. And do you know what? This was okay, things got better for me and things will get bet-



ter for your students and you. Take it easy through these times. Maybe you allow things to get through these first months like complaining or taking it easy.

Know that they will test you and show some challenging behaviors to see what you do. I am embarrassed to say that I tested my new team to see what I could do, but my aide was a farmer and had been working as an aide for many years. So I got away with nothing. It's going to be hard but I believe in you. Maybe you don't get to teach any life skills in the first two quarters, that is okay to do. What you are doing is building a relationship with the students and that is an important thing to do. And this is a phenomenal time to build a working relationship with their family members too.

Some AAC life skills to start working on during middle school are knowing when their device is dying, how to communicate that the device needs charging, and how to advocate for themselves. Middle school does go by quickly. Please make sure that they have time with typical peers too. Help your students join school clubs, clubs, or and school activities like plays.

Plays are amazing for AAC Communicators, because they can play their lines from a notebook on their device. I was in plays and I loved it. The school newspaper is great too, because they can help write a story for the newspaper. Anything that typical students and teachers see in a positive way is what we want. Allow students to talk to typical students in the hallway like anyone else does. When I was visiting a school it was between classes and no one in the special education classrooms was out visiting. I thought how sad it is. Did you gossip in the hallway like look what Tim is wearing today or did you see the movie this weekend. I know I did and that helped me to be faster on using my communication device, because I needed to get out what I wanted to say quickly. I had and still have quick hits so I could and can say what I want and wanted to say to my friends.

Before you know it, it will be time to talk about high school transition. Between four to six months before the end of the school year, you might like to start the transition. So, the students have time to imagine themselves as high school students. Plan visits to the high school as many as you can so they can see the classroom and the school. At least one visit goes to the school when they are having a fire drill, so the student can see how that will work. I will leave it up to you to tell your students whether or not that you're going to visit the school during a fire drill or don't share that with them.

Some people who are reading this might think that we don't need to plan a visit during a fire drill, because it is the same system at every school, the alarm goes off and everyone walks or drives out of the building. As a person who was afraid of fire drills from my first day of kindergarten in 1999 to my last day of school in 2013, it is way different on so many things. I will list some things here. Principals like to have the monthly fire drill at different times, where to go outside and when they are upstairs, and how long they need to listen to the alarm. You might like to

talk about this at the IEP meeting, so you can tell the new team what worked and what didn't work and share any tips you might have. Allowing visits to a new school does two things.

First it will give them a confident level with the high school staff members. Second thing is it will allow the high school staff members to see how you do things and to ask any questions that they might have about the student and or their assistive technology. You might like to do the same thing when students are starting middle school. On the last day of school, make a huge deal of them finishing middle school and celebrate their skills that they have learned. Maybe they learned how to make two or three word sentences, maybe they learned how to tell time, or maybe they learned how to speak up for themselves.

Let's celebrate that and invite their families and friends so they can tell the students what an excellent job they did and how proud they are of them. Now, it is time for high school! We all know that most of the high schools in the United States have four grades, but it is likely that the students who we are talking about will need to go to the same school for three to eight years longer. Think about that, at 18 years old, did you want to stay in your high school any longer? I know I didn't want to stay a second longer than I needed to, so I drove my power chair out as fast as it could go. ALL HIGH SCHOOL YEARS SHOULD BE MEANINGFUL, FUN, AND ENJOYING.

I believe that when you have a student that might need to stay longer than four years, before the student starts ninth grade you need to have a talk with the student and their family to make sure that everyone is on the same page. In the talk, be understanding of their feelings, please tell them that this might change, give them this blog to read, and answer any questions that they might have. You need to understand that this is their child that they love and hope the best for. It is an understandable feeling, but not the end of the world and you need to drive that point home.

Maybe you can give the family research and tools to help their child. Like council on Developmental Disabilities, any state programs about adulthood, and support groups to help them see the benefits of staying in school after 18 has. Again, the first few months are getting to know everyone, what they need to work on, what they haven't started working on, and what they know. If a student needs to learn how to tell someone that they need to use the toilet or need a change, you might think to put this at the top of the list. Because many places won't think of taking a person who can't tell someone that they need to go to the toilet or a change and that is an important life skill to have. Another important life skill to have is getting transportation.

In today's world, we have different ways to get to places. City bus, taxi, and subway aren't the only public transportation that we have available. We have uber and other shared transportation systems. It is important to teach all transportation systems that you have in your city so the students will know how to ride them to get to a job, stores, and to do fun things too. For the city



bus, they need to let the driver know where they need to get off at by using their device, how much a ride costs, and they need to be ready to get off. Some city bus companies let any students ride for a discount price or for free. You can put some bus language on a page, like today I'm going to, hello how are you, or can you help me please.

That way your students will have quick hits to communicate in the community. You can do the same thing for taxis, uber, and the subway too. The faster they can communicate in the community will be better for everyone. Now let's talk about places that you might like to think of taking. The goal is to get them ready for adulthood, so anywhere you think that they might need to go. The grocery store is a good place to go weekly or bi-weekly because everyone shops at the grocery store or a market. If the student is tube feed, bring the tube feed along so they can "search for it and buy it". Another great place to take them is the local library for them to search for books and look at magazines. You might take your students to the drugstore so they can learn how to pick up their medicine.

Community learning is a lot of fun but some things you need to teach in the classroom too. Sex education is so important to teach to everyone. Sex education for people who use AAC and or have cognitive disability is so key for them to learn, because one they want to know about what is happening to their body and two they are more likely to have sexual assault happen to them than any other groups. A friend of mine was assaulted at a camp, lucky another friend saw what happened and was able to report it. We need to teach these students about the body, what is happening to their body, and they always can say no or I don't like that to anyone. When you are changing them or helping them to the bathroom, always ask first and communicate to them what you are doing.

This way we are teaching them this is your body if you don't want anyone to touch you, it is okay to say that. It is their body and they should know what is happening and why. Another life skill to teach in the classroom is safety. We need to make sure that all of the students know how to be safe at school, in the community, at home, and on social media. Safety is important everyday and with everyone. The students who are using AAC need to know the following, who can I go to when I don't feel safe, where to go to when I am lost at school, a person friend me on Facebook that I don't know well should I add them, and I don't feel safe with the person that is helping me can I ask for someone that I know better. I believe that our number one job as education professionals is this, because it is a skill that they will use throughout their life. It is their right to ask for somebody different to help them.

They need to know where to go in school when they don't feel safe. Maybe it is your classroom, the office, or a sensory room. Please teach them how to get there and how to ask them to leave their class to go to a safe place. You might like to think about giving them a number of visits to the safe place a day because they can't ask to go to the safe place hourly just to get

out of doing work. Safety on social media is a new and an interesting topic, because social media is a newer thing to our society. We all add "friends" that we might know or have met once maybe and we follow people who are popular, sport stars, who are famous, but we can look at a page to say this is fake.

Can students with a cognitive disability tell that? We might like to start teaching social media safety to make sure that they know this important life skill too. Like during middle school please please make sure they are a part of the high school community and can join school clubs too. High school is a part of life. Who does not remember the first Friday night football game that you went to, the home coming weeks, playing jokes, and any time that you were with your group of friends. I know I do, man these were some of the best times that I had in my life. It wasn't learning but it was being with my friends. And that was the best. Please make sure that the students get some time alone with their peers {if an adult needs to watch a student at all time go down the hallway to watch}.

This is because teenagers enjoy their freedom. This does not change if you have a disability. My aide and teacher always made sure that I had freedom like anyone else had. This is what high school is and should be all about. Have jobs around the school for them to do like copying things and working in the mail room. If the school has a restaurant or a school store, have them work at it with typical peers. When they are turning 16 or 17, you need to look at what they still do they need to know and to work on before they leave school at 21 or 26. I know that I said this a lot in this paper, but they haven't learned how to tell people that I need to go to the bathroom. or I need a change please. You need to really work on that, because they will have more opportunities to do things and more places are likely to take them. This is sad but so true. Please work with their family and any outside people to help them to get this important life skill learned.

You don't want to have any field trip plan or anything that is hard for them when you begin the potty training. This is the only thing that you are working on, because it will be a lot of hard work for everyone involved. Potty training is easier when they are younger. Think about it, for years all they needed to do when they needed to go to the bathroom was go, now we are asking them to communicate before they need to go. Data is your friend because you can track how many minutes they have until they go to the bathroom and five minutes before they head to the bathroom to make sure that they will be on the toilet when they go. If they don't go, every five minutes go to the bathroom until they go.

When they go make a huge deal of it, like wow you did it you are a rock star or you are killing it. Before you know it they will be going to the bathroom on the toilet every time and have a huge celebration for them. Invite the family, the therapists, and principals to this. To learn more about potty training, please look up information about this. When students are getting nearer to seeing their friends finish high school, please ask them how they feel about seeing their friends move on. I finished high school



on time, but I didn't move out like my friends were going to college. I had the hardest time with it and couldn't imagine if I was still going to the same school and my friends weren't there. Maybe you might ask their friends to email or Facebook them sometimes so they don't feel left out. They can give their friends a weekly report on their school and their friends can give reports of how they are doing. Anything to keep them communicating and feel like they are still friends.

If your school district is lucky enough to have an apartment to work on life skills, that is awesome and try to spend most of the time there. Think of the apartment as the student's apartment, not the school, because we will use this as someone's first apartment. Have bills and send them there in the student's name, have the students shop for furniture, have them cook at least two meals a week, and have an agency work there too. Some of the AAC life skills to teach during high school are communicating what they need and want, to know where their device is at all time, to know what assistive technology tools that they have been using, and where they could turn for support.

Show them your state's assistive technology program and council, show them your state's disability programs, tell them about any state organizations, and any conferences that you think they might enjoy going to. Everyone who uses AAC needs to know where their device is at all times, because it is their voice. It is like your cell phone, I bet everyone in the world knows where it is at all times. Now do not hide the device to teach this. You can teach this by saying do you have your device any time they go out of the classroom. You might want to give the family information about your state assistive technology act program, their device company's information, and any assistive technology tools information so they have it and they know who to call when they need help.

If the student is going to a day program, try to start that when they are still in school. It is likely that the day program has little to no knowledge about AAC. So please train at least two workers who will be working with the student on their communication tools and how they use them. Hopefully that student will keep on using AAC this way. Tell the family about any email lists, it's about AAC and assistive technology like QIAT and Augmentative Communication list through Temple University. Now the students are in their last month of school, it is time for some celebrating! This is a huge time in their life.

Remember your last few months of school, did you want to do any of your work? I know I didn't want to do it. All that I wanted to do was have fun and enjoy every second of being with my friends. So let's make sure the students get that. Go on picnics, if you have any sport teams, go to a game, go to movies or watch movies in the classroom, visit their former schools, and stop in their former classrooms. The idea is to have a lot of fun and make life time memories for them and you. They might show some behaviors during this time, because they might be scared or worried about leaving the school system, I know I did. Make

time to check in to see how they feel and have a lot of time for discussions. You might do the same thing for their family members, because they are worrying too. I know in my last month of high school, I was so afraid of leaving school because that was my support circle for 15 years.

My teacher and my physical therapist [I had the same physical therapist for 6 years] told me this. We're not going anywhere Mike, you have our email addresses and phone numbers, if you need to talk through things just email us. My aide said the same thing. Knowing this was so terrific, because I knew that they will always be one email or phone call away. This is a time for celebration of the student's education, not a time to worry. You and they have planned for the day when they leave school, you have worked hard to teach them the life skills they will need, and everybody has support. It is time to watch the students grow into excellent adults. This last September marked 10 years that I started my last year of school, do I miss it? Sometimes, like I am sure everybody else does, but I am enjoying being an adult. I am thankful that my team taught me life skills and AAC life skills that I still am using today.

In closing, we have a lot of work to do about how to best support students who use AAC. To my knowledge our country doesn't track how many students are using a communication device and which placement they are in. This makes writing about how the United States of America does with educating children who are non speaking hard. We will be in the year 2023 when this gets published and we should have some information to start with, but we don't. I am calling on the United States education system and every state education system to put together a plan to help children who are non speaking to get an equal education as their peers do. It is time!!! ■



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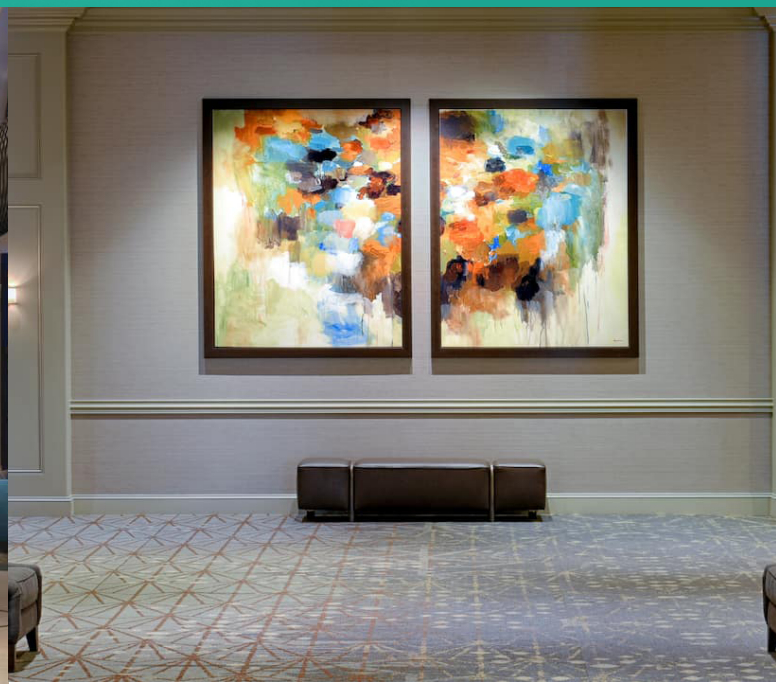
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Achieving Comfort and Confidence Tips and Activities You Can Do to Support Families of AAC Users

Summary: Do you feel your staff does an excellent job implementing AAC at school, but would like to provide more resources for parents at home? Read more to learn about how this unit school district (grades EC through Transition) provides coaching, training, and resources for families to help them gain comfort and confidence with supporting their child who uses AAC. Parent involvement begins before device implementation in an effort to empower families and create a partnership. The SETT framework for AAC consideration is

Universal core vocabulary
board

In our unit school district (ages 3-22), we feel a key part of our student's communication success is working together with the families of our AAC users. It is important to build relationships with families, meet them where they are, and support them throughout their child's AAC journey in our district.

GETTING FAMILIES ON BOARD WITH AAC FROM THE START THROUGH THE SETT FRAMEWORK

We have had a district-wide universal core vocabulary approach to language and literacy in place for over 15 years. When students enter our Early Learning Center at 3 years old, they are

exposed to core vocabulary visually and verbally through modeling our district's universal core boards. (See Image 1 and Image 2.)

If a core board with personal fringe is not meeting a student's access or communication needs, we schedule a SETT meeting. We feel it is very important to get parents involved in the AAC consideration process from the start. The SETT meeting includes parents, the school team, outside providers and anyone the parents would like to invite.



KELLY KEY is the Assistive Technology Coordinator for the Barrington School District (EC-Transition) in Barrington, Illinois. She has worked in the field of special education for over 26 years. Kelly has been in her current role (Assistive Technology Coordinator) for over 18 years. She has also served as an administrator for 13 years as a Special Services Facilitator and Assistant Principal. Prior to becoming an administrator, she taught special education students with multiple needs for 9 years. She has a Bachelor's degree in Special Education, a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Special Education, and a Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Leadership as well as an ATACP (Assistive Technology Applications Certificate). Kelly is also an adjunct instructor at the University of Illinois for their Assistive Technology Department. Kelly presents at local, state, and national conferences and colleges on various assistive technology topics and she loves to share what is working with her students to be able to help more students outside of her district.

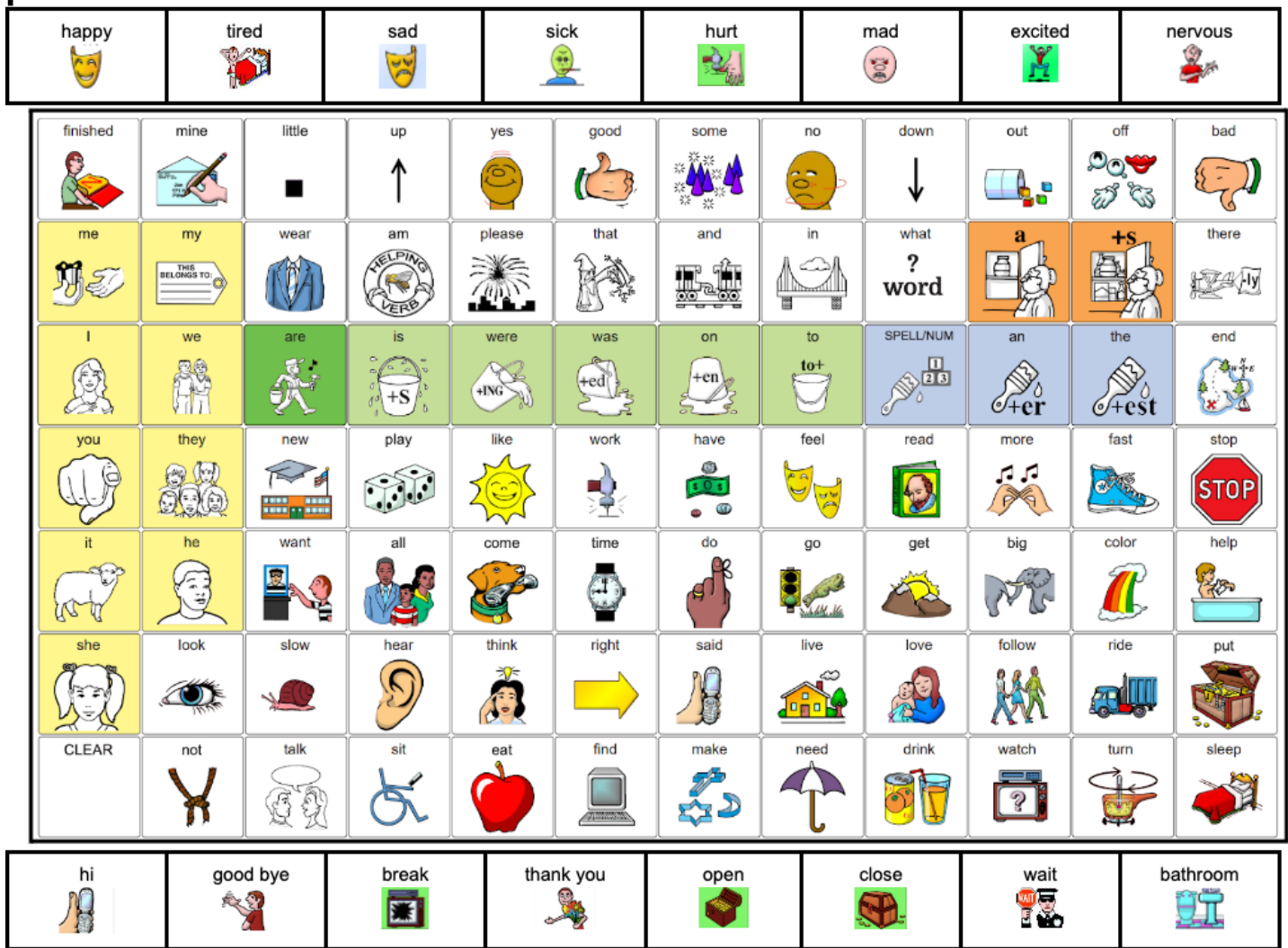


Image 1

Prior to the pandemic, this meeting was held in person, the past two years they have primarily been via Zoom or hybrid. This has helped families to fit this in their day and it helps to get as many stakeholders to the meeting as possible.

This is a very informal, positive meeting that allows the team to continue to build trust & relationships with families. It gathers information about the student from the home & school perspectives to guide the team in making collaborative decisions. The SETT meeting allows families to share their struggles at home and priorities when it comes to communication. It is a collaborative experience that enables all involved to participate actively. We make sure to create an atmosphere where everyone's thoughts and observations are heard, valued and respected. This meeting helps to get everyone on the same page. Since we approach it together from the beginning, it is our hope that everyone will be fully invested in following through on the tools and services that we deem appropriate.

During the meeting we follow a modified version of Joy Za-

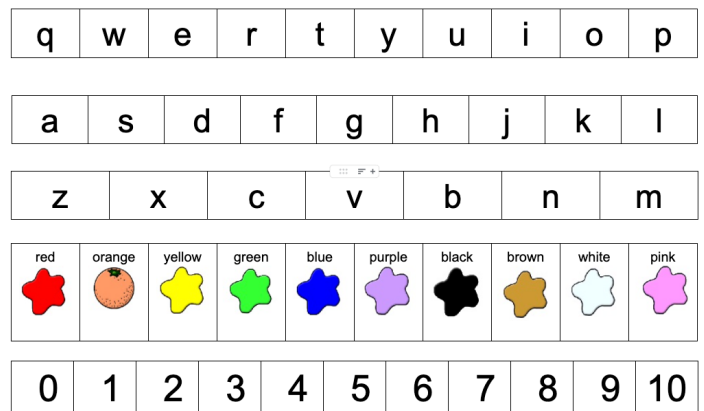


Image 2

bala's SETT Framework. As the district's Assistive Technology Coordinator, I facilitate this meeting. I feel that it is important for families to get to know me from the start, because I am the one consistent person that will continue to work with the student



TRAININGS & NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES WE PROVIDE FAMILIES

Tips for Trainings

We look at training as a collaborative process vs us just training families. We do our best to make our trainings meaningful, and fun. We try to help families understand how to support their child and gain comfort with modeling. We try our best not to overwhelm parents but instead work together. We often spend a lot of time talking about what is going well and what their greatest struggles are and problem solve together.

At every training, we remind parents that their connection with their child is the key and we do not want to lose that when a device is being used. We share that although this may be difficult at first, we encourage them to make the interactions with the device and their child as natural as possible, and to make it fun and meaningful for them.

We customize every training for each individual family and meet them where they are at. Often, we encourage them to take baby steps and set small goals to take the pressure off of them. For example: This week your goal is to have it with you when possible. Next week, pick an activity and make a few comments on it using 1-2 words. Once you feel comfortable with that, pick one routine you do regularly that your child enjoys and model during that one activity each day.

Initial AAC Trainings

Following the SETT meeting, parents and teams are provided 2 or more personal trainings that are customized to the student. During the first training session, we focus more on implementation strategies vs. operational skills. The second training session always starts with updates & questions from home and school. The families are provided with a customized device guide, low tech back up of their system as well as books and games to read and play while modeling on the device (see resources section for more details).

Host Trainings at Schools

A few weeks after the 2nd training session, I like to reach out to the student's parents to see how it is going, and see what questions they have. I then offer additional training or coaching (see coaching sessions). If a parent requests additional training, I reach out to all AAC users' families in that school to see if anyone else would like to participate. During these sessions, we mainly focus on helping families gain comfort with the language on the device through fun games and activities ie: Wheel of Core, Word Feud, Password, Headbands, etc).

through the years. The following is the information shared and gathered at the meeting:

We start off by getting on the same page with AAC and core vocabulary. I explain that AAC is a visual support for communication (Thank you Rachel Madel!) We also share that research shows that AAC can have positive effects on speech and language and does not prevent someone from learning to speak verbally.

We then gather information as we go through each letter of SETT. For each letter I have a slide where I type in the information shared. Each slide has a picture of the student to remind everyone the focus of the meeting is centered around the student.

Below is the information gathered for each letter of SETT:

Student- Information about the student: age, grade, siblings, pets, family members they see regularly, likes/ hobbies, motivators, strengths, areas of difficulty, fine/ gross motor/ access needs, hearing/ vision needs. IEP goals for speech and language and access.

Environment-We know communication is needed in every environment- here we talk about a few things. First, everyone shares what they are currently using to support communication (every mode including aided and unaided) in all environments & updates from home & school. We then share what is currently set up in each environment to encourage communication (ie: visual supports, communication partner skills, etc).

I also like to ask the families during this portion of the meeting; What do you like to do together as a family (at home and outside of the home)? What are some things you routinely do? What does your child love to do with you?

Tasks-During this portion everyone shares answers to the following questions; Specific to communication, what are your priorities when it comes to communicating? What do you want the student to be able to communicate that he/she is not able to now? We list specific words and phrases and intentions as well as situations where breakdowns occur. I also ask, How do they communicate; wants, needs, feelings, something is wrong, etc. We then talk about what vocabulary is needed for these situations.

Tools- Here we discuss the features needed on a communication system. This includes but is not limited to: access method/ modifications, vision/symbol size, visual modifications, hardware (strap, handle, size, weight), etc. I like to even ask what the student's favorite color is so we can provide a case that is in their favorite color.

If we have trialed LAMP (our universal language that goes with our low tech core boards) with success, we jump right into a mini LAMP training and all of the possibilities it offers during the Tools portion of the meeting.



Family Fun Nights



Over 10 years ago we hosted our first Family Fun Night. This is a 1.5 hour evening event held at one of our schools. Parents and their child that uses AAC attend, and they are encouraged to bring anyone else they would like. We have had siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. We provide childcare for the younger siblings (tip: contact your high school volunteer coordinator to get students that need volunteer hours). The goal of Family Fun Night is to help families gain comfort with device use and modeling through hands-on activities that they get to take home. Our core committee members (made up primarily of teachers, SLPs, OT/ PTs, and myself) provide standby coaching and the families model while enjoying the activity with their child. The evening starts off with an overview of tips and resources on a specific topic to support their AAC user at home. We then break up into three groups with three different activities. (See Image 3) There are 3 activity choices and the families choose 2 of the 3 activities to participate in (ie: shared reading activity, playing with a toy activity, and playing a game activity). The parents leave Family Fun Night with the materials

Breakout Sessions:

1-Game Activity- all parents get cored out game- also talk about how you would use with other games (make scripts for games in LAMP, Accent, and Word Power)

2-Literacy Activity - all parents get cored out paper book- also talk about how you would use it with other books make cored out books.

3- Talking with Toys- give form to fill out- they fill in the vocabulary and practice using the device.

Image 3 - Photo of the Schedule

for each activity they participated in (ie: shared reading book printed from www.tarheelreader.org, a game printed from AAC language labs, or a toy purchased in bulk online (ie: wind up toy, kinetic sand, bubbles, etc). (See Image 4) They also leave with tips sheets, visual supports, and much more confidence with supporting their child with communication through the use of their AAC!



Image 4 - Examples of what they take home



Virtual Parent Networking Groups

A speech and language pathologist and I started a monthly parent networking group last school year which we call; Parents and Professionals Partnering Together. The goals of this group includes:

- Parents make connections and create a community with other parents of students that use AAC.
- Reduce feelings of isolation or disconnection
- Build group wisdom among support group members, so that parents develop greater confidence in supporting use of AAC at home and in the community.
- Build the relationships between the district staff and parents in the district
- Incorporate ongoing training opportunities on AAC skills and knowledge
- Increase parent's comfort level and confidence
- Support growth of group wisdom among participants regarding their AAC experiences- parents helping parents!

In our monthly meetings, everyone participates via Zoom. The parents chose the time and topics through a survey sent out at the beginning of the school year. The meetings are scheduled for 45 minutes (but they often go over). Parents have access to a google drive folder with the slides from each session as well as additional resources we share. Parents have the option to share their contact information to connect with one another outside of the meetings.

The structure of each meeting is the same:

Introductions

- Check in/ Introductions-parents share their name and any information they want to share about their child & answer an ice breaker question

Check in/ Introductions- make sure to unmute when it's your turn

- Share your name, child's name & grade and what they use to support communication (ie: LAMP, Proloquo2go, Touchchat, low tech board)
- How confident do you feel about supporting your AAC user (scale of 1-10)? *10 is very confident*
- Ice Breaker Question: Share your favorite local restaurant you like to go to as a family

v

- Review the goals of the group
- Review group guidelines

Group Expectations



- Please keep stories and conversations confidential
- Everyone's AAC journey is different
- Be mindful of outside noise (mute yourself when necessary)
- Ask any questions about AAC and helping to support your child with their device. If you have specific questions about your child's IEP, you can discuss those outside of this group time with your IEP team.

Group expectations slide

Topic of the month- staff provide 15 min training

Community building/Group wisdom (the best part!)

- We give time for parents to ask questions/share experiences
- Encourage other parents to offer suggestions as opposed to the "expert" model

Wrap up

- Final thoughts, words of encouragement & Next meeting date/topic

Virtual Coaching

This opportunity began during the pandemic. It involves two or more virtual sessions with families. Prior to our first session, parents send in videos of their child when communication breakdowns occur. During the 1st session, the team meets with the parents via zoom and shares tips and answers their questions. During the 2nd session, parents choose an activity they do regularly at home and they do this activity with their child and via Zoom, we watch them do the activity and coach them on the spot. Now that we are back in person, we try to schedule these on institute days or in the summer when our students are home, or for our early childhood students that attend ½ day, we will meet when they are home the other ½ of the day.

RESOURCES WE PROVIDE FAMILIES

Bag of Resources

At our first training session with families, they receive a bag of resources. This includes; a tote bag with a screenshot of their child's home screen on it, a pillowcase with their child's home screen on it, the device guide, the low tech back up of their device, cored out books to practice (Gretchen Storm has amazing books she created that go with many of our student's page

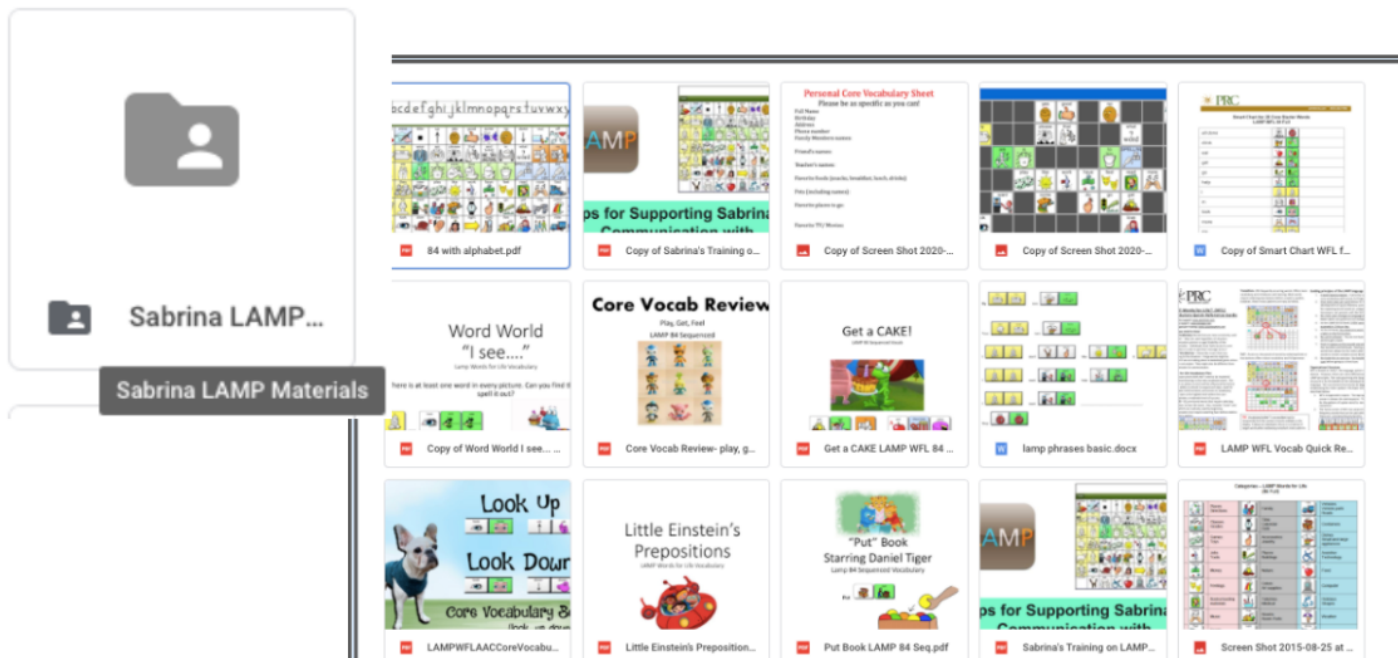


Image 6 - Google Drive folder filled with resources



Image 5 - Bag of resources

layouts at www.stormspeechtherapy.com), visuals for home, a game to play, finger prompts, etc. (See Image 5)

Personalize Google Drive Folder

Parents are provided a link to a Google Drive folder filled with resources and activities shared at the trainings (See Image 6)

Getting to the CORE of Communication Tips for Supporting your child at Home




<p>Target words= Help & Me</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>help</p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>me</p>  </div> </div>	<p>Tips for encouraging the target words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put items in site but out of reach Put items in a clear bin or Jar with a tight lid <i>*remember to have fun with it- do not make it seem like work</i>
<p>Modeling Tip=</p> <p>Model from your child's perspective:</p> <p>le: It looks like you are telling me I need help.</p> <p>You look frustrated, are you saying help me?</p>	<p>Video Example of Modeling from your child's perspective:</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Scan QR code with your phone camera</p>
<p>This Month's Virtual Training Topic: Modeling from your child's perspective Date: 3/17/21 12:00 & 7:00 Zoom Link:</p>	

Image 7 - Newsletters



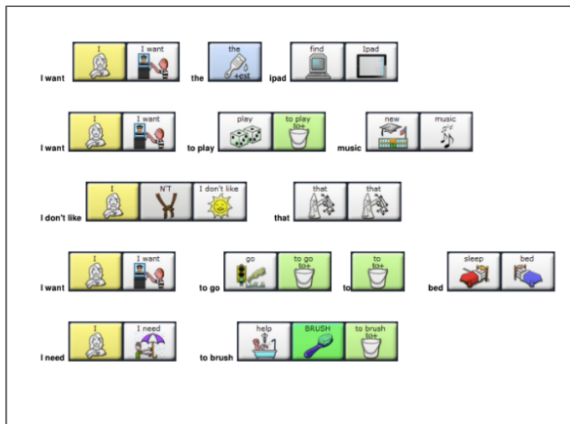


Image 8 - Visual Supports for Home

Device Guide

Each family receives a personalized device guide at the first training. The guide covers all of the information we share at the trainings, including video links of modeling examples.

Newsletters

Our teams send home monthly newsletters to families. The newsletters include the target word(s), a modeling tip of the month, a QR code to a video demo, upcoming training opportunities, and more! (See photo 7).

Visual Supports for Home

We also provide a variety of visuals for home. At a recent conference Tanna Neufeld called it "Core Decore". Families receive several laminated copies of their child's device main page paired with fringe vocabulary at the top that goes with that area of the home (ie: favorite toy items in the playroom). We also provide visual scripts for students and parents to use as a visual support for communication (ie: I need help please) and visuals to remind the students and their family to get their device out of their bag when they get home (See Image 8).

Videos

We are able to provide helpful tips through short videos we sent home. We have 30 min or less and 5 min or less videos on specific tips that we send home. We also often email videos of the students at school (communicating with their device, and staff modeling with their child during activities). Families have shared they appreciate these videos and seeing their children communicating with others at school has been very helpful.

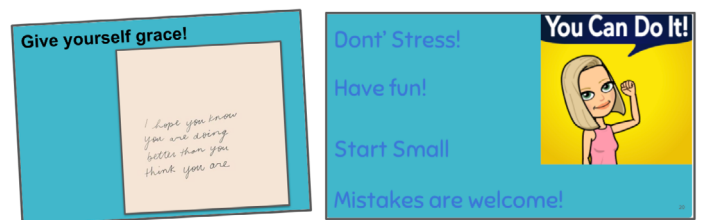
Blogs and Sites we Share with Families

There are many great online resources for families. These are some of the sites we share with families.

- [CanChild](#)
- [PRC-Salttillo Caregiver Resources](#)

- [Assistiveware's Parents and Professionals Trainings](#)
- [Atypical Son](#)
- [Love That Max](#)
- [Uncommon Sense](#)

We love to add words of encouragement in our trainings and resources sent home. Here are some of our favorites:



"Doing something, even if it isn't perfect, is infinitely better than doing nothing at all..." (Robin Parker, [praacticalaac.org](#))

Image 9 - Words of Encouragement

We are always brainstorming new/ additional ideas to support families, some future ideas include;

- Super Saturdays- monthly activities hosted by the school where families can meet and have fun
- Parent Mentors- connecting parents of seasoned AAC users with families new to AAC ■



Put Me In, Coach: AAC Coaching Models

Summary: When you hear the word coach, do you think of where most of us sit in the plane or of someone giving directions, calling plays, or providing resources? To support our students/clients, professionals need to have a variety of coaching strategies in their toolboxes and know when to use them. This article will discuss the characteristics of a coach, the principles of partnerships, and three coaching models: relationship-driven, stakeholder-centered, and client-centered

INTRODUCTION

When you hear the word coach, what do you think? Someone giving you commands? A mentor? A guide? A collaborator? A cheerleader? The fancy bus? The clothing brand? The airplane seats most of us sit in? Coaches can fill many roles, and coaching can mean many things, especially as it relates to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and Assistive Technology (AT). Why are there different models of coaching, and what makes a good coach? In this article, we will explore what coaching is, the characteristics of a good coach, the role of partnerships, and three types of coaching: relationship-driven, teacher/stakeholder-centered, and student/client-centered. Each of these models has different purposes, approaches, and outcomes for people who use AAC or AT and their stakeholders. Throughout the article, stakeholders refer to anyone, including the person who uses AAC or AT, who has an interest or stake in supporting the person who uses AAC or AT. For example, the parent(s), grandparents, a religious leader, teachers, therapists, and friends are all stakeholders because they care about the person who uses AAC or AT. A team refers to a group of people

who work together on a regular basis to support the person. All team members are stakeholders but stakeholders may be a part of more than one team.

WHAT IS COACHING?

A coach is someone who supports others to improve a skill or increase their knowledge about a subject. Usually, a coach has specialized knowledge about an aspect of the field. The focus of coaching is on supporting stakeholders, including the client/student.

Coaching is not evaluative or focused on making a stakeholder do something. It is not about fixing others.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A COACH

When thinking about coaching, it's important to have a shared understanding of what makes coaches effective. According to the educational coaching researchers, Diane Sweeney (retrieved 2021) and Jim Knight (2007), good coaches share the following qualities:

- Are curious



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BACK TO
CONTENTS

- Reflect
- Listen
- Collaborate
- Support others
- Celebrate successes
- Are not judgmental
- Meet others where they are
- Are authentic
- Ask good questions
- Seek understanding

Sweeney (retrieved 2021) and Knight (2007) agree that good coaches support the stakeholders to have good instructional practices, which results in better outcomes.

COACHING IS A PARTNERSHIP

In order for coaching relationships to be effective, there needs to be a good partnership. Knight (2010) identified the following principles of partnership that are an essential part of coaching:

- Equality
- Choice
- Voice
- Dialogue
- Reflection
- Praxis
- Reciprocity

EQUALITY: All stakeholders are equal in terms of what they have to offer. Everyone, including the coach, learns from each other and truly listens, values, and incorporates the ideas of everyone in the planning of supports or strategies. Everyone's thoughts are valued, even if they are different. Team members listen to understand, not to persuade. This can be a big shift for teams, especially those used to a consulting model. Within the partnership framework, the goal is to understand and support each other.

What this looks like: Stakeholders identify priorities, and everyone agrees to shared priorities. Parents and non-specialists have equal input. There is no "I'm just a parent" "I'm just a teaching assistant" or "That's above my pay grade". Even if they aren't physically present, team members' feedback and ideas are shared with other stakeholders.

CHOICE: Because partners are equal, they make their own decisions and make decisions collaboratively. Team members choose the approaches to take and the tools to use. Coaches do not intend to make stakeholders "think like them". Instead, the coach's goal is to meet the stakeholders where they currently are in their practice and offer choices for learning based on the team's shared priorities.

What this looks like: Partners identify what they want to learn about. This can be a big shift; at least at first, partners may benefit from the coach giving some options. When working with

a team, the coach may ask things like, "What would you like to get out of our time today?" "What is your priority for today?" If they don't have responses ready, the coach gives some choices such as, "Do you want to look at how writing is going?" "How has recess been?" "How has John's device use changed since we last met?" The coach may also ask, "how is it going?" or follow with specific questions such as, "How did the session go with Joe when you embedded icons to support communication into your Google Slides?" This will often get the conversations started and help stakeholders open up about their priorities for the time together.

VOICE: All individuals in a partnership have an opportunity and are encouraged to express their points of view. A primary benefit of a partnership is that each stakeholder has access to many perspectives rather than the one perspective of the coach. Coaches view partnerships as a process that helps team members find their voice, not a process determined to make stakeholders think a certain way. In an effective coaching partnership, everyone should find and have their voice. It is the role of the coach to facilitate the thinking process, let all stakeholders speak, and make sure everyone has felt heard.

What this looks like: Everyone has an opportunity to speak. When stakeholders cannot be at a meeting, other stakeholders reach out to them to bring their voices to the collaboration. For example, a teaching assistant and parent were often not at regular collaboration meetings with a team that I was coaching. However, the treating SLP and I checked in with them about how things were going at school/home and what their needs were. Without their input, much of what we knew about the student would have been missing from our conversation and planning because they see a different side of them.

DIALOGUE: In a partnership, one person does not impose, dominate, or control. Partners engage in conversation, learning together as they explore ideas. Partners listen more than they tell. Partners avoid manipulation, engage everyone in conversation, and think and learn with each other. Rather than information giving, a conversation is the best approach in effective coaching. By listening, coming to an agreement, and collaborative problem-solving, coaches can guide, but not dominate, the conversation. Thus, the coach is guiding questions and supports reflective thinking.

What this looks like: The coach talks less or as much as the other people at the meeting. Coaches do not come in like Superman and offer answers to the questions they think people have. If they did, they may be discussing an area where there is no question/issue at all. This leads to more relevant and important issues remaining unsolved. Instead, coaches ask Socratic questions such as, "Why do you think Jamie isn't using their device at lunch?" or "How could we support Jack to use his device during recess?" and then listen and take note of the responses. If stakeholders answer, "We don't know, that's why we are asking you", the coach may respond something like, "Each team's chal-



lenges are different. It may be helpful to look at the barriers and decide which one we can try to address first. We can't jump to solutions if we don't know the problem or challenge." In partnerships, coaches ask clarifying questions and put solutions/ideas out tentatively. "I wonder if letting Kate's classmates use her device would help them be more patient and understand how hard using a device can be. What does everyone think?"

REFLECTION: Reflective thinkers must be free to adopt or reject ideas. Stakeholders provide space and time for everyone to make sense of any new information and then make their own decisions. We all need time to think when we are given new information, especially when that new information encourages us to change or adjust our behavior. Time to reflect on information, ideas, and practices should be built into an effective coaching model.

What this looks like: When following up, ask for successes and how the strategy or technique that the stakeholders were going to try went. For example, "How did it go when you used the paper-based board to demonstrate throughout the session?" "How did Joey respond to using voice typing to complete an assignment?" This starts a conversation about what went well, what could be changed, and supports everyone being reflective to build on successes and support challenges. It's essential to reflect on successes and what made them successful because success breeds success. Additionally, professionals tend to focus on challenging situations or things that need tweaking. It's beneficial to pause and reflect on successes to build confidence and morale.

PRAXIS: In education, praxis is the knowledge and skills one needs to be an effective teacher. It is also defined as the customary practices or practical application of a theory. Thus, coaches support teams to learn about current theories, research, and how they can be practiced in the classroom/everyday life. A coach's role is to help stakeholders put evidence-based practice into action. It isn't to tell them what to do, but to present information in a user-friendly way and see how it might apply to their situation.

What this looks like: This can take many forms in a coaching relationship. It may be providing resources or research articles for stakeholders to read in their own time about a need that they've identified. It may be providing training to teams on a topic that they've identified wanting to learn more about. For example, a team of Speech-Language Pathologists that I currently support wanted to learn more about how to do effective AAC evaluations. We have been exploring the conversations to have before evaluating, the information needed to gather during an evaluation, and how to get that information in play-based activities. As the coach, I've shown videos of what that may look like. We've had conversations and collaborative problem-solving when things for one of us didn't go as planned/hoped. We are all increasing each other's knowledge about evaluations and how to support families.

RECIPROCITY: All stakeholders benefit from the success, learning, or experience of others. We learn alongside each other. The successes of a stakeholder are the successes of all, and everyone should celebrate together. Reciprocity in learning is also crucial. In ever-changing, ever-advancing fields like AAC and AT it is important to keep up. Coaches share what they learn, but in a way that allows others to decide what they want to take in and when.

What this looks like: Celebrate when the person who uses AAC or AT has a success, especially if it is a small one. Share research articles that others may find helpful or interesting and ask them to do the same. Share other learning opportunities like conferences, webinars, etc. By genuinely sharing celebrations, people are more likely to also share support.

In summary, as Eleanor Roosevelt said, people remember how you make them feel. People who feel important, valued, and empowered are more likely to make changes and adapt to the needs of their clients/students. Effective partnerships support stakeholders to better support everyone and improve outcomes for people who use AAC or AT.

COACHING MODELS

As previously mentioned, there are three main models of coaching: relationship-driven, teacher/stakeholder-centered, and client/student-centered. In each model, the coach has a different role and supports the stakeholders differently.

Coaching models and effectiveness			
Model	Develop Partnerships	Improved outcomes	Benefits
Relationship-Driven	X		Builds relationships and trust. Comfortable/familiar
Teacher/Stakeholder-Centered	X	Sometimes	Stakeholders/teachers may start to use new strategies/techniques that support student/client outcome/performance
Client/Student-Centered	X	X	Improves client/student outcomes/performance, supports client/student development

Table 1: Three main coaching models



RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN COACHING

In relationship-driven coaching, the coach is a friendly resource. They are the go-to for research articles, if a stakeholder needs to borrow tools, or if they have a “how to” question. The coach provides these resources in a non-threatening way. They support the stakeholders to build knowledge, usually what the stakeholder requests. Think of a helpdesk but always getting the same person for support. The stakeholders ask a question, the coach teaches them how to do what they asked. That’s the end of the exchange usually. There usually isn’t ongoing follow-up to see how things went or if it helped. This is often what stakeholders may think of as the role of the coach, especially if they haven’t participated in other coaching models in the past.

When engaging in relationship-driven coaching, coaches can work on building a partnership and trust with the stakeholder. Since the coach is seen as non-threatening, this type of coaching can help build the trust needed as the foundation of a partnership. However, research shows that this model does not impact student or client outcomes much (Joyce & Showers, 2002). So, while this model may often be a place to start when coaching, it isn’t the most effective long-term model.

TEACHER/STAKEHOLDER-CENTERED COACHING

The next model of coaching is teacher/stakeholder-centered coaching, which may currently be the most common model of coaching. Since the model is borrowed from educational coaching, the term ‘teacher’ is used. In teacher-centered coaching, the coaching relationship centers on changing the stakeholder’s behavior. Coaches may be teaching the stakeholder a new skill or demonstrating a technique that the stakeholder can use with their client/students, etc. After the teaching or training, the coach follows up with the stakeholder to see how the stakeholder is doing with what the coach trained them on. The coach sets the agenda, provides support, and follows up with the focus remaining on the stakeholder. Coaches using this model might use coaching cycles similar to those in client/student-centered coaching (see figure 1).

In teacher/stakeholder-centered coaching, the coach is more of a collaborator and is often there to hold the person accountable. In this type of coaching, a coach may meet with stakeholders to problem-solve a challenge that the team is experiencing or support a district/organization initiative. For example, they may meet with the coach to discuss why a student isn’t using their communication device. Because aided language input is important for learning and is good practice, the coach sets a goal of stakeholders using an AAC device 10 times a day for their own messages. The coach then shows the stakeholders some sample messages that they could use throughout the day. So, the coach has trained them on how to use the AAC device and given them training on the partner strategy of aided language input or demonstrating. However, research shows us that knowing how to use the system isn’t enough (McNaughten et al 2019,

Ogletree 2012). We also need to know why. Coaching research has also found that focusing on the stakeholder’s behavior without bringing it back to the client/student doesn’t impact their outcomes much (Joyce & Showers 2002, Knight 2007, Guhlin 2019, Sweeney retrieved 2021).

Thus, the focus is on the stakeholders and their behavior. This improves outcomes for the person who uses AAC or AT more than simply giving resources. However, while providing training on evidence-based strategies supports stakeholder knowledge, it may not translate into the practice of them doing the strategy. This is because the goals didn’t originate from the stakeholders, and they may not understand the why of the strategies.

CLIENT/STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING

In client/student-centered coaching, stakeholders are seen as valuable and skilled and set the agenda. While the coach may work primarily with various stakeholders, the student or client is the focus of the work. In client/student-centered coaching, the coach leaves their perspective and seeks to understand the stakeholders. Coaches let go of their preconceived ideas of what should be done and support stakeholders to develop their own plans.

Sweeney (retrieved 2021) identifies the following student-centered coaching core practices:

- Use coaching cycles
- Set standards-based goals
- Unpack goals into learning targets
- Co-plan with student evidence
- Co-teach using effective instructional practices
- Measure the impact on student and teacher learning
- Partner with the school leader

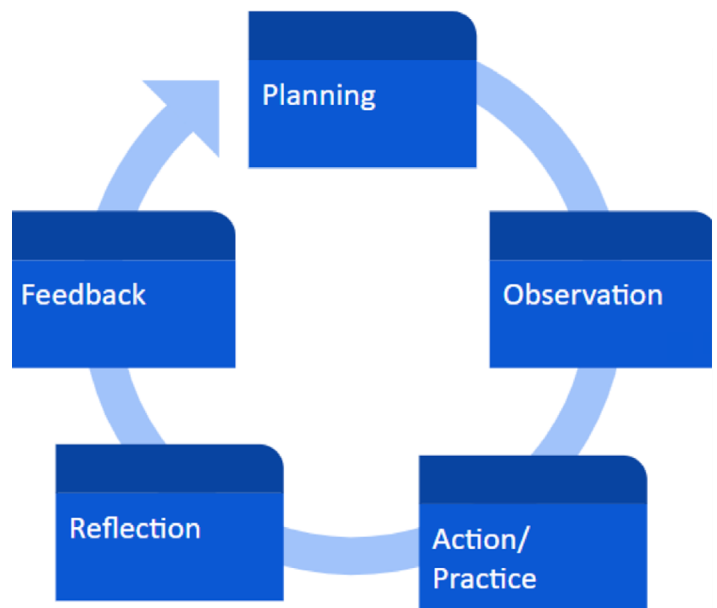


Figure 1: Client/student-centered coaching cycle

What does this look like? Typically, coaching cycles are 4-6 sessions and the stakeholder guides the goals. The cycles follow a similar structure, as seen in figure 1, but the interactions and paths of learning are not prescriptive. Overall, the goal of the coach is to support critical thinking, decision-making, and reflection in order to develop ways to support the client/student. Even if the coach doesn't have 4-6 sessions with a team, they can bring the principles of the coaching cycles into work with stakeholders.

As illustrated in figure 1, typically, coaching cycles have a process: starting with planning, the coach observes the stakeholder(s) and the person who uses AAC or AT working together, the coach and stakeholder make an action plan and practice that plan, the stakeholder(s) and coach reflect, the coach gives feedback, and then the process is repeated until the stakeholder's goal is met. The steps don't have to be done in person and can be done through a quick video call or email. So, even if the coach doesn't have time in their schedule to meet with stakeholders 4-6 times, aspects of this cycle can still be used.

In a different client/student-centered coaching process, Cognitive Coaching (Klein, 2018) uses 3 steps: pre-conference, observation, and post-conference. These 3 steps incorporate action/practice in the observation and feedback/reflection in the post-conference. So, for those working more as consultants or with heavy workloads, that may be easier to build into schedules.

Client/student-centered coaching uses coaching cycles where the stakeholders set the goals and the coach supports them. The coach is a guide and mentor and supports the stakeholders to make their own decisions. While the person who uses AAC or AT may not be physically present in the coaching sessions, they are central to it and the impact on them is always the focus.

SUMMARY

Effective coaching relationships are partnerships where coaches support all stakeholders to have equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity. In relationship-driven coaching, the coach is seen as a friendly resource for materials or training. It focuses on one-off interactions where the coach helps the stakeholder and is often used to build trust as the foundation of partnerships. However, since there isn't a focus on client/student performance, this model has little impact on people who use AAC or AT. In stakeholder/teacher-centered coaching, the coach often sets the agenda/learning targets and focuses on teaching the stakeholder how to do things. Because the stakeholder isn't setting the agenda, this method is not as effective as student-centered coaching. In student-centered coaching, the coach supports stakeholders to support the person who uses AAC or AT to have better outcomes. The person who uses AAC or AT is central to the coaching sessions and cycles, even if they are not physically present. The stakeholders are

seen as valuable and skilled. Their input and learning are central to client/student-centered coaching and supporting people who use AAC or AT. While client/student-centered coaching may take more time, it is shown to better support people who use AAC or AT.

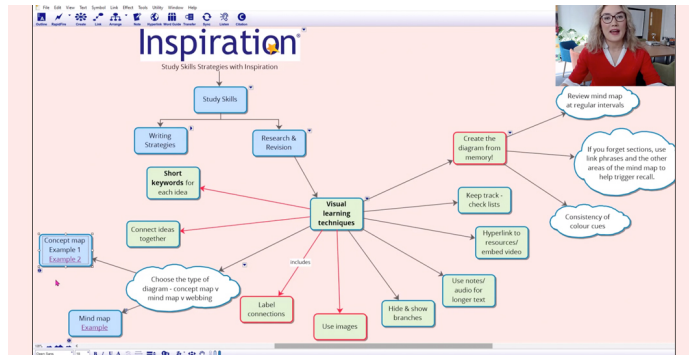
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product spotlight

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Inspiration 10 and Inspiration Maps boost creativity, encourage critical thinking, and break down barriers to planning, communicating ideas and learning; helping users to achieve more academically and in the workplace.

Amazon's Fire TV expands Audio Streaming for Hearing Aids to Cochlear implants



Today, Amazon and Cochlear are announcing the launch of Audio Streaming for Hearing Aids (ASHA) on Fire TV for people living with hearing implant technology, just ahead of International Cochlear Implant Day on February 25. Improving TV sound quality was one of the most requested features among some of the 1.5 billion people living with hearing loss worldwide, according to Amazon research.



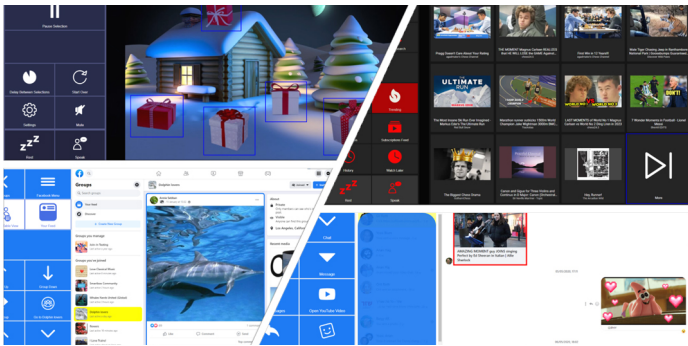
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Join-In creates an accessible, simple, and consistent digital environment for using popular apps and websites. The environment is optimized for people with complex disabilities and for AAC users.

The three design principles are:

Accessibility – Join-In supports a wide range of sensory, cognitive, and physical access needs.

Simplicity – the dynamic toolbars make the most common actions on each screen easy to find and perform.

Consistency – while each app has its own dynamic toolbar, the design of the different toolbars is consistent across apps – e.g., the location of buttons related to common functionality, the logic behind common flows, and the icons. This makes the learning process easier.



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EVA FACIAL MOUSE PRO – Control your smartphone hands-free by just moving your face



EVA FACIAL MOUSE PRO – Control your smartphone hands-free by just moving your face

EVA tracks your face movements using the front camera and artificial vision techniques. A mouse pointer allows you to control all the actions of your device.

EVA is intended for those people who cannot use a touch-screen. For instance, some people with amputations, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) or other disabilities may benefit from this app.



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