Engaging families to interact using 
AAC: What have we learned? 
Gayle Porter & Linda Burkhart

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Your child needs to learn to communicate 
using AAC

Selecting an AAC system

Interaction is critical for communication 
and language development

- Family and friends will continue to be the critical influence 
on the child’s communication and language development.

- However, these interactions will now also need to 
incorporate the use of alternative forms of communication.

- Immersion in the alternative form effectively supports 
children learning to use AAC
  - Parents are faced with learning to communicate in a foreign 
form that they have most likely never experienced or seen used 
by competent users of AAC.
  - Natural interaction patterns may be compromised as parents 
attempt to manage a new AAC system.

Families learning to communicate using 
AAC

“An environment which supports the acquisition of alternative language forms 
does not seem to come naturally.” von Tetzchner & Grove, 2003, p. 13
“No one taught me to communicate, I just learned it”
(Kim at 13 years old).

Families learning to be users of AAC
• In order to create an aided language-learning environment, families need to develop fluency using the system.
• Since there typically is not an immersion environment readily available for the adults learning to use AAC, they need to be taught in a more direct and graded manner.

How do we help families learn to use AAC?
• “Because communication partners must learn to alter well-established patterns of interaction, successful training requires understanding and guided practice.”
  Blackstone 1999, p. 4
• “It is important to keep in mind that people have lots of interests and responsibilities to juggle. If partners do not have the time, the resources or the desire to change their behaviors, they won’t. Thus, whenever you sense resistance, ask about it, and then listen very, very carefully to what you are being told.”
  Blackstone 1999, p. 4
• “having sufficient information for collaboration”

How do we help families on this journey?
• Shared understanding
• Insight – complex communication needs
• Motivation – Why?
  – see how using AAC can add to my child & families’ life
  – Long term implications for my child’s future
• Knowledge of possibilities
• Guided practice to develop competent use of AAC (sufficient skills, knowledge and judgment)
• Practical ideas and support for juggling it all

Early childhood service
• Parent education sessions
• Day care & Kindergarten staff education sessions
• Ongoing modeling and coaching during
  – Parent and child group programs
  – Home visits
  – Day care, kindergarten visits

Parent education sessions
• What is Cerebral Palsy?
• The CPEC Program
• Developing your child’s communication
• Using AAC at home
• Key Word Sign & Gesture
• Sensory processing challenges
• Other specific topics
  – Juggling it all – learning to operate a SGD
  – Accomplishing your child’s communication
  – etc
Developing your child’s communication session

• Beliefs, concerns and questions (asked or not) influence uptake of AAC, understanding of communication
• Aim to develop a shared understanding of important concepts
  – Communication is multi-modal, we all use AAC
  – Communication is complex
  – Communication for varied purposes
  – Interaction of child and partner in typical development of communication and speech
  – Why child with CP might have difficulty learning to communicate, develop speech
  – AAC will not prevent speech development
  – What is important to their child is autonomous communication
  – Learning communication, language & speech happens during genuine, daily life interactions and takes time

Developing your child’s communication session

• Provide insight into their child’s communication requirements
• Inspire
  – recognise possibilities for their child to become an autonomous communicator
• Motivate to use AAC
  – understanding of why autonomous communication is important to their child and family.
  – Needs to be important to make the effort required by the family to learn to use a different form of communication
• Understand it will take input before their child begins to use the system
  – Interaction, not an aid, supports children learning communication and language

Communication
Creation of shared meaning

Co-constructed
Understanding & Expression

Communication is complex

• Sensory
• Motor
• Cognitive
• Pragmatic
  – Social emotional
  – Functional uses
  – Conversation skills
• Language
  – Semantics (word meanings)
  – Syntax (grammar)

All these skills are integrated together for communication
**Sensory**

- Understanding others
  - Hearing
  - Auditory processing
  - Vision

- Feedback to learn to express self
  - Hearing / auditory processing
  - Feedback from body
    - Position and movement
    - (Vision)

**Movements for communication**

- Facial expression
- Body language
- Gesture (sign)
- Speech
  - Muscles of respiration
  - Larynx (vocal cords)
  - Soft palate
  - Jaw, tongue, lips/cheeks
  - Writing
  - To use communication aids

**Clear Connected speech requires sufficient**

- Speed, range, accuracy, strength, grading, co-ordination and rhythm of movement of the muscles for respiration, vocalisation, intonation and articulation.

**Single sound**

**Syllable**

**Word**

**Sentence**

**Practice producing speech sounds**

- Feel how little changes in the position of articulators changes the word produced
  - Short vowel /a/ and /e/ difference between “bad” and “bed”
  - Tongue position to co-articulate “park” “peek”
  - Sounds may be produced differently, “amamama” using jaw movements

- Being able to say a sound in one word context, may not mean you can say in all word contexts

**Pragmatics (social use of communication)**

- Use of language, vocalisation, gesture, facial expression, eye-contact, body movement
- Appropriateness of communication
- Taking turns in interaction
- Initiating communication
- Feedback to partner
- Repairing communication breakdown
- Selecting, introducing, maintaining, changing topics
- Changing communication to suit different partners, situations & social roles
- Use of communication for different purposes

**Varied communication functions**

- greet
- manipulate
- relate information
- agree / disagree
- ask questions
- instruct others
- ask for things
- joke
- express an opinion
- share information
- express feelings
- protest
- describe
- discuss internet
- “MAKE SOCIAL CONTACT”
- bargain
- comment
- request / attract attention
- complain
Language

- Language is made up of socially shared rules that include the following:
  - What words mean (e.g., "star" can refer to a bright object in the night sky or a celebrity) - Semantics
  - How to put words together (e.g., "Peg walked to the new store" rather than "Peg walk store new") - Syntax
  - How to make new words (e.g., friend, friendly, unfriendly) - Word morphology

- Language is different from speech. Language may be in a variety of forms:
  - Spoken language (speech)
  - Written language
  - Sign language
  - Graphic symbol / Pictograph language

How do children typically develop communication, language and speech?

Typical development of communication

- Explain the typical development of communication, speech and language
- Early communication
  - Gestural / vocal communication
  - Spoken language communication
- Emphasize the interaction of child and partner behaviors in this development
- At CPEC, children have mild to severe movement challenges, so we also emphasize the sensory and motor skills that enable this development

Typical development of communication (cont)

- As sensory motor skills develop child begins to
  - Make more purposeful movements - act on things and move in their environment
  - Babble with more varied speech sounds (this is also influenced by changes in anatomy)
- People respond to all these behaviors as meaningful - provide a linguistic (language) map of the interpreted meaning.
  - E.g. child looks towards drink - partner says "Oh, You want a drink"
- People use gesture and talk about what the child is interested in and attract the child’s attention to what they are talking about (shared attention)

Typical development of communication

- Typical sensation and movement
  - Innate skills - spontaneous development
  - Responses and movements familiar to partners
- Early communication
  - Newborns innately interested in faces
  - People speak to infants from birth (intonation patterns attract attention)
  - People interpret meanings of infants body movements, crying etc
  - Infant smiles or coos in response to other people’s speech (1-4 months)

Typical development of communication

- Gestural / vocal communication
  - As sensory motor skills develop further (often about the time the child is sitting / moving away from adult) child begins to
    - Imitate gestures and vocalisations
    - Use gestures to communicate
    - Shows objects/ pictures to communicate
    - Sequence movement to actively gain partners attention and indicate message
    - If sign is home language - begin to sign
  - People respond to all these behaviors as meaningful - provide a linguistic (language) map of the interpreted meaning.
Typical development of communication

- Spoken language communication
- Sensory motor skills develop for more controlled speech sound production
- Initial spoken words are approximations, often only familiar partners understand
- Sufficient experiences of language used in meaningful contexts to work out the meanings of words and sentences
- Need to have the AH HA moment!
- Natural feedback to child’s attempts using words helps the child clarify the meaning.
- First words may have overgeneralised / undergeneralised meanings

Learning to communicate

- Happens during real life interactions
- Parents & others
  - Model communication throughout the day
  - Expect that their child’s behaviours are meaningful
  - Respond to their child’s behaviours as meaningful
  - Shape more specific behaviours
  - Expand the child’s communication towards the adult form

Learning to communicate

- Parents are generally
  - Competent users of the spoken language, gestures & body language of their community
  - Have intuitive knowledge of their communication system
  - Teach the complex skill of communication as they go about their daily life
  
  It is the families own system of communication that they are “passing onto” their child.

Learning to communicate

- Children generally
  - Have ample opportunities to practice
  - Receive natural (meaningful) feedback about their attempts at communicating
  - Gradually work out what communication is about and how to use it.
  - Integrate all the skills they require

The challenges learning to communicate for the student with CCN

- Understanding the child’s current communication & challenges learning to communicate
  - Receptive and expressive
  - Gestural & speech
  - Variability of responses

- Separate out understanding spoken language from cognitive understanding (with visual input).

- Identify challenges assessing children with severe motor impairments until have a method of communication

Children who have cerebral palsy

- May experience difficulty with any one or a number of these components

- Likely to experience challenges with sensation and movement
  - Facial expression
  - Body language
  - Gesture
  - Speech
  - Writing
Cerebral Palsy

- Key issues affect movements available for communication, e.g.
  - Set patterns of movement
  - Associated reactions
  - Sensory seeking or avoiding movements

- Difficulty *spontaneously developing* and using typical gestural and spoken communication.

- “Different” movements may be misinterpreted / difficult to understand by partners

Speech for Children with CP

- Disassociation and stability for graded oral movements (need to look at whole body)
- Postural control for respiration and phonation
- Dysarthria
- Dyspraxia
- Oral sensory feedback
- Language impairments
- Associated difficulties e.g. Hearing impairment
- Other communication difficulties, e.g. stuttering, developmental articulation difficulties, delayed language development

Speech intelligibility is influenced by

- Context / knowledge of topic
- Knowledge of partner - familiarity with
  - Speech patterns
  - Likely words / topics
- Appropriate language and pragmatics
- Speech production
  - Intonation
  - Syllable number
  - Accuracy of vowels
  - Accuracy of consonants
  - Voice quality
  - Fluency

“I dot a dell”

- If you were at the beach with me yesterday and we were walking along picking up ……
- “I got a shell”

Aim

For the person to meet his/her varied communication requirements as
- intelligibly
- specifically
- efficiently
- independently
- in as socially valued a manner as possible
To understand others and to be understood.

Long term aim for all children

Understand other people
and
Being able to say what I want to say, to whoever I want to say it to, whenever I want to say it
Enable individual to more fully and effectively participate in various social roles

Problem-solve the circumstances required to enable every child to meet his/her varied communication requirements

- To understand others & express self
- Full range of
  - Purposes (e.g. ask questions, complain, comment)
  - Messages, topics
  - Social roles (e.g. student, sister, friend, employee)
  - Partners
  - Environments and physical positions
- Express individual personality

Solutions include Speech & AAC
(Augmentative & Alternative Communication)

AAC may be suggested when

- Adding AAC to speech assists understanding
- Speech is likely to be significantly delayed
- Speech is difficult to understand – AAC as a back up system
- Limited speech – AAC main method of communication

Probable effects of AAC on speech

- Share the research that AAC
  - does not prevent development of speech
  - studies suggest AAC may enhance speech and/or language development
- But also need to understand
  - Why AAC does not stop speech development
  - How AAC may facilitate speech development

Remember

- The purpose of speech production is communication
- The ability to use language is important in terms of how it enables us to meet our communication requirements
- **Communication is the engine that drives language** Martine Smith (Agosci conference, Sydney 2003)
- **Language** Communication and **speech**
**Multi modal communication**

- We all use multiple modes to communicate.
- Choose the most effective method to “get our message across”
- Different modes of communication may be more or less effective to communicate
  - different types of messages
  - in different situations
  - with different partners

**Everyone uses AAC!**

We all use AAC when external or internal constraints limit the effectiveness of our spoken language.

- **External constraints** e.g.
  - Noisy environment
  - Over distance
  - Other person does not understand your language

- **Internal constraints** e.g.
  - Laryngitis
  - Complex communication needs

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**Noisy environment**

**Over distance**

**Foreign speaking Country**

**Laryngitis**
Complex Communication needs

- Difficulty using speech to meet all varied communication requirements
- Speech not effective to get message across more frequently
- Need to use other methods more often
- Worth investing in AAC system to support more effective communication

Give participants a choice

- Choose 50 spoken words that you can use for the next week
- OR
- Pen and paper / AAC system that lets you say whatever you want to say
- For children with CCN we do not need to make this choice - use both the words they can say and the AAC system

“Hidden” difficulties

- “I understand everything she says”
- So what is she saying?
- Who is she talking with?
- How many ideas, thoughts, feelings, opinions, stories are being left unsaid?

What can you guess?

- Messages in infancy tend to be limited to the here and now - basic messages easier to guess
- As children develop they begin to think messages that are much more difficult to guess.
  - Communication for more than “What do you want?” or “What’s wrong?”

Selecting a communication mode to suit the requirements

Situation: Lunchtime - cup on a table
Message: I want a drink
Message: I want a different drink
Message: My drink is too cold
Message: Peter drank all of my drink
Message: Last night I had a Pepsi-Max

Situation: Outside in playground
Message: I want a drink

“Just because you know me doesn’t mean you can read my mind or can express my words for me.”

Melinda Smith, 2011

“It all comes back to understanding that not being able to talk doesn’t mean you have nothing to say.”

Melinda Smith, 2011
Autonomous communication

• Being able to say what I want to say, when I want to say it, to whoever I want to say it to

NOT the same as choice making

NOT the same as answering a YES / NO question

What do you want to do?

Yes & No

Being able to answer Yes / No is very useful
- quick responses
- confirm messages
- to access communication display

Asking yes / no questions can also be very limiting.

Child can only respond to the other person’s ideas and suggestions.

Multi-modal communication

• For child’s self-esteem, personality and cognitive development we need to value and respond to all their messages.

• Children are very sensitive to the attitudes of people around them.

Combine AAC & Speech Interventions

• To enable child to meet their current communication requirements

• Stimulate further development of communication, language, literacy and (where possible) speech.

• Support autonomous communication: to enable the child to learn to say whatever they want to say to whoever, whenever

PROMPT

Prompts for Restructuring Oral Muscular Phonetic Targets
Creating an Aided Language Learning Environment

At the beginning (13 months) Patrick had minimal verbal skills (only 2 words - 'mum' and 'dad') but it was obvious that he wanted to participate in what was going on around him in a more active way. The introduction of AAC (in his case a communication book with multiple smaller displays for specific activities such as eating etc. that could be easily used in limited spaces) was hugely liberating for Patrick and for us as a family. Patrick was able to contribute to conversation, not just with yes and no, but to actually make independent statements himself and lead the conversation. This really helped to build his self-esteem and make him even more motivated to try harder, not just in communication but all activities.

I can certainly say that AAC was a major step forward for all. I can also say that using AAC did not stop Patrick from trying to communicate verbally, as it is simpler and easier to talk. By the time Patrick was 4, he was fully communicative verbally. He is now (7) fully understandable across a whole range of situations including a mainstream primary school, where he very keenly contributes to class discussions. I am so grateful for the opportunity given to us.

Donna (Patrick’s mum), NICE discussion forum Re: AAC in Conductive Education 11/11/04

Development over time

Different methods to access AAC systems
Different aids for different purposes

- Selecting from objects
- Informal auditory scanning
- Activity displays
- General interaction displays
- Step communicators
- Communication book
- Speech generating devices

Range of possibilities for communication at ANY TIME

- Selecting from objects
- Informal auditory scanning
- Activity displays
- General interaction displays
- Step communicators
- Communication book
- Speech generating devices

It is not possible to rely on a High-tech device as the only option for communication

All people who use Aided AAC require a light (paper) tech option

Selecting a communication aid

- Hardware
  - Paper, dedicated device, PC, tablet, iPad
  - Size, shape, display, battery, memory, processor speed, Bluetooth, IR, WiFi, mounting, stand, durability, LOOK
  - Possible access methods
    - touchscreen, keyguards, auditory/visual scanning, eye-gaze
  - Computer access / other programs / cool stuff!

- Software program
  - Options to support communication and language,
    - Vocabulary organisation, navigation, symbols, word prediction, rate enhancement, word morphology, coding, etc
  - Options to support access / layout, e.g. button spacing
  - Customisation and programming options

- Language organisation / page set(s)

Hanen tips

- Follow child’s lead, abandon fixed agenda
- All Hanen tips are based on current research which shows that parents have the power to boost their children’s language:
  - Make it easy for their child to start conversations
  - Respond with interest to whatever their child tells them, with or without words
  - Talk frequently with their child about things of interest to the child
  - Have conversations with their child that go back and forth a number of times
  - Talk at a level that their child can understand and learn from (not too complex or too simple)

Start with the Whole System But Teach Systematically

- Families report frustration:
  - When only given a limited amount of vocabulary (too little)
  - When told to just use the whole system to say whatever they say with their voices (too much)
Teaching Patterns

- Identify Patterns in the System
- Select Patterns to teach based upon child’s language level and adults personality styles
- Teach / Coach use of one pattern at a time (partners)

The Brain is not a Video Recorder

Teaching Patterns

- The brain stores memories as patterns
- The brain retrieves memories through patterns
- Patterns enable learning large amounts of information without memorizing details

The Brain is Pre-Wired to Look for Patterns and Comparisons to What is Known

Patterns Can be Visual, Spatial, Auditory, Tactile, Kinesthetic, Temporal, Procedural, Cognitive, Linguistic, Multi-Modal, etc.

Languages have patterns

- Syntax / grammar
- Word forms (tense, plurals, etc.)
- Semantic meanings
- Pragmatic use
- Interactional patterns

Я хочу, чтобы Eu quero que أريد أن
Je veux que I want that Ich möchte, dass
Θέλω ότι

We don’t learn language by memorizing the dictionary
We learn language patterns through use

Patterns in AAC Systems
- May be based upon
  - how vocabulary is organized
  - coding of similar vocabulary
  - communicative function
  - semantic groupings
  - use in natural contexts
  - layout - motor pattern

Teaching Partners Using Patterns
- Limit complex written or oral explanations
- Teach them to follow patterns
  - Rather than memorizing where vocabulary is located or learning to say specific messages
  - Uses recognition instead of recall memory
- Teach them to fish!
- Support spontaneous use throughout the day
- Support habits for autonomous communication at any time

Patterns in PODD as an example
- Start with teaching how to say quick core words in natural contexts throughout the day
- The language level of the PODD book guides the partner in what to model
- The idea is to let partners feel the experience of how patterns lead you to what you want to say (Not just tell them)

12 Early Functions
- I did it
- Your turn
- I'm done
- I'll help you
- Look at me
20 Expanded Functions

I'm finished
You are not finished
I'm just kidding
more please

70 Expanded Key Word

I am finish (-ed)
You are not finish (-ed)
You can do more
Watch me, I am do (ing) more

Complex Syntax

You need to finish do (ing) that now
I do not know how to do it
She forget (-s) how to do it
I will help her do some first

In trainings, we ask people to use the practice books to see what they could say in natural contexts throughout the day from page 1a and 1b (Quick Core)

Select One Navigational (pragmatic function) Pattern

Learning Patterns Give an Opinion

Gayle Porter & Linda Burkhart
ISAAC Conference, Lisbon Portugal
Learning Patterns

Complain

We often ask children what’s wrong? But that doesn’t help child learn to complain

- Instead of asking are you tired?
- Model how they could say it
  - Linguistic Map
- Put word on to what you see
  - “Oh, you look very tired”
- Can add the word word “maybe”
  - “maybe something’s wrong, maybe you are tired”
Learning Patterns
Request an Activity
I want vs. Do you want?

- As adults, we don’t often request things of children.
- We often say: Do you want a book? (or It is time for a book) Not “I want a book”
- We have to consciously model the request.
- If child doesn’t really want that, they are now on activity page and can request something else.
- Also model requests from other people nearby for the child to observe.

Catch Yourself and Develop a New Habit

- Think of something you would typically say “Do you want ______?”
- Turn it around and say I want ____.
- If Kid is reaching for something, say Oh I think maybe you want ____.
Relating Information

Let the Level Book Guide You as to What to Model

- Patterns in early books are used and expanded upon in later books
- Books progress through increasing levels of syntax, semantics, discourse and interactional patterns
- Appropriate level book allows you to model just slightly above the child’s expressive level

Expanded Functions

More to say
Expanded Functions

I'm telling you something

Expanded Functions

It's already happened

Expanded Key Word

child birthday party

Expanded Key Word

I (past tense) went to a birthday party

Complex Syntax

Navigational Side Panel from any page

Special Event
Let’s try it! Opinions Section

- “I think he is cute!”
- “I think he is ugly”
- “I think he is handsome”
- “I think he is gross”
- “He is cool!”
- “I love him”

Same Patterns are used in PODD on SGDs

Let’s try it! - Opinions Section

- “You are unbelievable!”
- What other opinions can you give?
Same Patterns are used in PODD on SGDs

Plan for communication AT ANY TIME

- Autonomy to communicate whenever I have something to say
- According to own intentions - Right to choose when to communicate (or not)

Habits to support autonomous communication

- Routinely ensuring the AAC system is readily available for use ALL THE TIME – Prepared for communication AT ANY TIME
- Providing enough time for the person to communicate their own message in the manner / words they prefer

FIRST STEP: Establishing Healthy AAC HABITS

- Communication AT ANY TIME – AAC is child’s VOICE
- Problem-solve and practice having AAC systems with child AT ALL TIMES, EVERYWHERE.

General interaction displays

- Provide general vocabulary to communicate across a range of activities & between activities.
  - Say a LITTLE AT ANY TIME
- Limited vocabulary - used alongside activity / topic displays.
  - New partners practice HABITS while preparing to introduce more complete personal AAC system

Strategies to transport book

Prepared for communication

Multiple strategies for communication at ANY TIME

Where is my “VOICE”?

Gayle Porter & Linda Burkhart
ISAAC Conference, Lisbon Portugal
Grade your expectations

- Don’t need to model it all right now!
- Have more there to be prepared for less predictable communication opportunities (maximise language learning in meaningful contexts)
- Gradual expansion of use
  - First just model quick chat (PODD first page) throughout the day
  - Then select one type of message / communication function to use throughout the day, e.g. opinions, something’s wrong, Let’s go...
  - Add functions / messages / branches / section /...
  - Then another ......

Different learning styles and speeds

- Grading expectations using the whole system allows people to progress at own speed
  - Can jump ahead of expectations
- Some families start using whole system quickly
  - Jump in and give a try
- Other families take more time / confidence to try
  - Sometimes need to come in a target new learning, getting it correct, confidence to try, life’s intervening!
- March to July 2014
  - Variation between carrying book and using first page, using a few branches / different messages in familiar contexts, to jumping in trying all sorts of messages in all contexts

Modeling and coaching in the real world!

- Communication happens within the mess of living a family life
  - Not a game or activity that you fit into your day
  - Communication happens when you’re busy doing other things
  - Pragmatic cues to communicate vary
  - Physical positions vary
  - Environmental clutter
  - Other responsibilities
  - Etc, etc

Modeling in the real world!

- Need to model within real contexts where communication is not the primary activity
  - Model coming in and out with communication
    - Child watching TV, mum doing the laundry
    - Daily routine and activities
    - Varying messages
    - Varying physical positions
    - Responding to child’s possible communicative behaviours
      - Linguistic maps, Problem solving meaning, Co-constructing messages
      - Problem solving environmental constraints

CPEC parent and child group programs

- Holistic program provides opportunities to model during activities where the primary focus not communication.

CPEC parent and child group programs

- Group of children
  - Not all focus on one child
  - More need / practice initiating communication
- Range of models
  - Speech pathologist, OT, physiotherapist, assistants
  - Other parents and children
  - Range of naturally occurring, genuine messages
    - Model Linguistic maps, Problem solving meaning, Co-constructing messages
    - Range of physical positions
Coaching in the CPEC program

- Parents repeating (imitating) what staff said using AAC
- Stop and suggest, e.g. “Maybe parents could tell their child what that thought about that”
  - Staff available to shadow light cue parents
- Supporting families to recognise opportunities to communicate using AAC
  - Expectant look towards book / Placing book near parents / Light cue to books
- Verbal reference what child is doing to help people recognise possible initiations

When will my child start using the PODD?

- From 15 minutes to 4 years!
- Cannot expect a child to use something they have not had opportunity to learn
- Depends on a number of factors including:
  - Number and quality of experiences of other people using the AAC system to communicate genuine messages
  - Method of initiation and responsiveness of partners
  - Communication opportunities provided by partners
  - Current understanding of (spoken) language
  - Sensori-motor skills / method to access aid

Child led communication

- Easier to talk when already have something to say!
- Establish methods for child to initiate communication
- Respond to child initiations
  - Do not demand use!
- Focus on interaction - trying to understand each other!
- Have fun!

Development may take time, not always smooth!

Learning opportunities

- Lots of receptive input (18 months - 2 years)
- Sensory motor strategies to develop movements for communication
  - Task series
  - Sensory program (diet)
- Specific prompts and cues to stimulate expressive use (only after lots of receptive input)

Distance Coaching

- Skype, Google Hangouts, etc. (Share screens)
- Email
- Shared videos on private YouTube channel
- Phone conversations
- Facebook
**Tips and Tricks**

- Start with live interaction
- Build rapport
- Establish some shared beliefs and understandings
- Work with the whole team, not just the family
- Attending a training together (especially if there is limited local expertise in the AAC System)

**What works well over distance?**

- Selecting and customizing Vocabulary
- Trouble shooting technical problems
- Video review with child not present
- Live coaching of partners interacting directly with a child
- Repeated contact
- Team meetings

**What doesn't work well over distance?**

- Understanding and getting a feel for a child's movement patterns
- Understanding and incorporating strategies to deal with some sensory challenges
- Trying and tweaking a range of access methods
- Modeling in natural contexts for partners
- Prerecorded video works better than real time coaching with very active or shy children

**Techniques**

- Share information and video ahead of time
- Have a clear focus for the session
- Same strategies as live, but in smaller increments
- Frequent repeated contacts instead of long conversations
- Bluetooth, wireless head set for partner
- Future - remote control surveillance type camera - only used during live interactions!

**Update Information**

- Describe what you have tried in terms of communication strategies since our last visit:
- How did the child respond?
- What were some of the successes and positive outcomes?
- What problems did you run into?
Update Information

- List some examples of messages the child has communicated:
- List some examples of the types of messages that are modeled for the child using the PODD or other AAC system, on a regular basis:
- Language samples

Quick Language Sample
Child Initiated Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Child Initiated</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>Message That the Child Communicated</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/7/11</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Locked in</td>
<td>Want / bathroom</td>
<td>Ask - independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/7/11</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>vocalized</td>
<td>Think / silly</td>
<td>Group - children's fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/7/11</td>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Seemed upset</td>
<td>stop</td>
<td>Reading - words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/7/11</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Touched book</td>
<td>Something's wrong / sick / twenny / go / home</td>
<td>lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/7/11</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Locked in</td>
<td>goodbye</td>
<td>End of day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Language Sample Forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Language Sample Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Communication Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want / to do something / say / categories / first word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oh, you want to play with the ball, do you? Let me see what kind of balls we have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>category / describing event / big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That's a good idea. I love playing with the really big ball, now if I could just remember where it is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>child points to closest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You want me to look in the closet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>child needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alright, let me see if it is there.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Code: Print text = speech
Interpretations / gestures = Enclosed in parentheses
Aided Language use (PODD) = underlined
Capital letters = Sign Language
Indices or Glosses = list of choices and concrete items according to context
// = phrase or word represented by one symbol or one action in aided systems

Update Information

- What would you like to focus on as the next steps for the child?
- What would you like to focus on as the next steps in learning for the team?
- What are your main objectives for this session?
- Major concerns at this time:

Parents Supporting Parents

- Group of families with children who have similar challenges
- Compatible personalities of parents
- Kids using similar AAC systems
- Range of ages - parents of older students supporting those of younger children
- Keep group to a manageable number and have one parent willing to handle details or delegate

Family Led Groups

- Group of families with children who have similar challenges
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Family Led Groups

- Group of families with children who have similar challenges
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Activities

• Group family outings
• Parents switch kids during outings and use AAC to talk to each other’s children
• Mom’s night out - emotional support
• Sharing strategies to collaborate with school teams
• Attending each other’s IEP meetings
• Inviting a few school team members on outings

Facebook

• Easy accessibility - People are often already using Facebook
• Don’t need to check a separate web page
• Can learn by listening to dialog of others
• Can find others who are facing similar challenges - some who are farther along the path of using AAC with their children
• Cautions: Some people may use it to make inappropriate statements. I have found if it is a strong group with clear shared ideas, that this can start a productive and positive conversation

What makes a good Facebook Group?

• Closed group of families with similar needs and beliefs (narrow focus)
• Dedicated professional(s) to monitor, comment and encourage regularly (may limit number)
• Everyone uses the files section to store responses to Frequently Asked Questions and annotated lists of web links
• Members comment on old posts to bump them up to the top when there is a relevant discussion that has already taken place.

Facebook (Professionals)

• Encourage families to post success and videos if they are willing. Videos have been fantastic motivators!
• Always try to state the positive before giving advice
• Empathize with and support families through challenges
• As a professional, type your posts in Word first to spell check and make sure you want to say that before posting!

Additional Challenges with Distance Consultation

• Problems can escalate - you may not pick up on issues in a timely manner
• Challenging and confusing for parents when there are local people who are actively advocating against the child using the AAC system - undermining parent’s trust

Ideas

• Important to locate and build local knowledge and support
• Build the knowledge of the family
• Help families find other families to support each other
• Connect families who are more experienced with new families
• Be a good listener
Engaging families with AAC is a Collaborative process

• Listen carefully, not just to the words but what may be underlying the words

• Ongoing encouragement and practical support
  • Enthusiasm will come and go, especially if child requires a longer period of receptive input before expressive use that adds to family interactions

• Once child begins to use AAC it becomes easier, because their autonomous communication reminds partners why they are making the effort.

What have you found helpful in learning to use AAC?

• Evening information sessions provided helpful background information and understanding of AAC.

• Access to the PODD books and ALDs at CPEC made it easy and simple to implement practically.

• Ready availability of Speech Therapists at CPEC who are trained in AAC.

• Use of it consistently in Group Sessions.

• The fact that every other family at group is doing it.

What have you found helpful in learning to use AAC?

• I have found the use of the books in-group great. It has really helped me to cement the ideas and use into our home life.

• I found the communication sessions handy, as it gave a lot of context as to why we use the books.

What have you found helpful in learning to use AAC?

• The information sessions were useful and it was good to start to use AAC gradually - Gayle and Teri encouraged us to use the displays first, and then just the initial pages in the communication book. I felt Fleur responded pretty well to these, and my husband was more inclined to use them.

What have you found helpful in learning to use AAC?

• The most helpful way we’ve found to learn AAC has been through the hands-on support we receive at CPEC. The constant use, demonstration and total immersing of oneself and the group into the use of AAC has been the strongest way in which we’ve learned to use it. Through this constant use by the therapists and group participants, I’ve gained confidence in using our AAC.

• In the earliest days of learning to use AAC, we were advised to just learn to take our PODD everywhere we went and make it available to Jeremy at all times. This was a fantastic way to introduce the AAC into our everyday life, without the added pressure of having to learn another language right away. These small adjustments to everyday life make implementing a ‘new system’ that much easier to adapt to and imbed into our routines.
What have you found helpful in learning to use AAC?

- I see now how small steps are crucial in implementing AAC as it helped us to acquaint ourselves with the process slowly, in that we were able to slide it into our routine. Once it becomes routine and the AAC is everywhere and readily available, we had to overcome the confidence issue of actually using it and not being afraid to get it wrong.

- For me personally, the totally immersion of PODD at group session was the biggest way in which I began to overcome the confidence hurdle. At home, I had to adopt a ‘fake it til you make it’ approach. Basically this meant that I wouldn’t always be using the PODD in the technically correct manner, but would push on, model and model some more.

Is there anything that might have better supported you learning to use AAC?

- At the start of introducing high-contrast PODDs, to be talked through the ‘plan’ for progressing to more advanced PODDs etc. To be able to visualise and understand what the ‘next step’ will be and look like.

- I would like to see say a 4-year-old using AAC (so a couple of years above Grace) to see what they are able to do with their communication. That means a child with the CVI book not just the regular book, or at least that the child that started with the CVI book and has progressed.

What advice would you give another family in your situation, who are just beginning a similar journey?

- This is daunting. It is going to be hard to get your head around it, but once you work out that your child understands not only the pathways but also the vocab, it’s all worth it.

- It took me months to realize that Grace could understand and respond to the material. I felt that the therapists were trying to be super positive and lead us to believe that she was communicating. It was only after I saw her use the communication at least 10 times, that I believed them. It shocked me mostly because she knew her body parts. How did she know that?

- The other thing is that it is hard to bring the entire family on the journey. It does take Grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins etc. a while to grasp what you are doing. But if you do it enough in front of them and make it look as normal as talking, then they will understand and use it too.

- Do it! It can be frustrating and painful and inconvenient to carry the books around everywhere but the benefit of Zac having a voice, choices and options will be worth it.

- Get organised – organise your house and stick up ALDs to maximise the number of times you will use them.

- Ask questions when you are unsure of something or not happy with something...
The final thing I want to say goes back to the title of this post, "Just Do It". I see people post often about just not knowing what to do with the PODD, it's not working for them, they need to learn it better, etc... My piece of advice on how to be successful with the PODD is to just do it.

http://understandinglu.blogspot.pt/2014/02/just-do-it.html

Supporting families with

- Shared understanding
- Insight - complex communication needs
- Motivation - understanding WHY
- Knowledge of possibilities
- Guided practice to develop competent use of AAC (sufficient skills, knowledge and judgment)
- Practical ideas and support for juggling it all

to “JUST DO IT”