# AAC

# TRAINING GUIDE

A 5-step system for AAC implementation based on research!

# ST⬛P!
## Let's be Real.

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## SPEECHY musings

# INCLUDED UNITS:

## 1) AAC Basics

Goal: Get familiar with AAC. Understand the different types and why it's important.
- Examples of content included in this section include:
  - Types of AAC
  - AAC Best Practices
  - Top 5 AAC Myths

## 2) Access

Goal: Make sure individuals who could benefit from AAC have access and can use their system at all times.
- Examples of content included in this section include:
  - The Importance of Providing Access
  - Presuming Competence
  - Access Visuals and Reminders

## 3) Modeling

- Goal: Ensure that everyone who communicates with an AAC user knows how to model using their communication system.
- Examples of content included in this section include:
  - Modeling FAQs
  - The Plus One Technique
  - Teach More, Test Less

## 4) Core Vocabulary

- Goal: Focus your efforts on teaching and modeling core vocabulary instead of situation specific words.
- Examples of content included in this section include:
  - Core Vocabulary vs Fringe Vocabulary
  - Selecting Target Vocabulary Words
  - Descriptive Teaching

## 5) Communication Opportunities

- Goal: Consistently provide communication opportunities for all students who use AAC throughout their day.
- Examples of content included in this section include:
  - 15 Communication Opportunity Ideas
  - Communication Functions
  - Prompting/Wait Time

# CONTENTS:

# CONTENTS (cont.):

# Important Notes:

- "AAC system" and "communication system" are used consistently throughout this packet to refer to any AAC system (PECS book, core vocabulary boards, high tech devices).

- The term "AAC user" is used throughout this packet based on feedback from AAC users that this is the preferred term.

- In general, the units of this packet were intended to be taught in order, however I would recommend doing an assessment of the current AAC programming where you work prior to implementation. Use the sections as needed and don't feel like it all needs to be implemented in order or even at all.

- Some of the pages included are meant as examples (e.g., the month by month AAC challenges). There are editable versions included in the editable forms file so that you can customize them for your own needs.

- The editable forms, along with all of the contents in this product, are to be used for your own caseload/school. You may not edit them for resale. You may not claim them as your own. Please keep my copyright information on them.

- The training PowerPoint file includes ideas of what to say in the "notes" section of most slides. Make sure you check that out if you use that file to train your staff.

# IMPLEMENTATION STEPS:

**AAC Basics**
- Get familiar with AAC. Understand the different types and why it's important.

**Access**
- Make sure individuals who could benefit from AAC have access and can use their system at all times.

**Modeling**
- Ensure that everyone who communicates with an AAC user knows how to model using the communication system.

**Core Vocabulary**
- Focus your efforts on teaching and modeling core vocabulary instead of situation specific words.

**Communication Opportunities**
- Consistently provide communication opportunities for all students who use AAC throughout their day.

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**Core Vocabulary**
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**Communication Opportunities**
- Consistently provide communication opportunities for all students who use AAC throughout their day.

# How To Teach AAC

☐ **AAC Basics**
Get familiar with AAC and what it is.

☐ **Access**
Make sure the system is out at all times.

☐ **Modeling**
Consistently model using the system.

☐ **Core Vocabulary**
Focus on core vocabulary and keywords.

☐ **Communication Opportunities**
Plan opportunities for communication throughout the day.

# WHERE TO START:

**1 - Does the team understand what AAC is, the basics of implementation, and why it's useful?**
**YES –** Great. Move on to question 2.
**NO –** Start with **unit 1** – AAC Basics. Hand out relevant forms and familiarize the team with the basics of AAC including student specific info.

**2 – Are AAC devices out and available consistently throughout the day? Does the team understand the importance of AAC access?**
**YES –** Fantastic. Move on to question 3.
**NO –** Use **unit 2** to teach the importance of consistent AAC access. Attach reminders to the device and use the Access Challenges as needed.

**3 – Does the entire team understand how to model on the AAC device? Are they doing so consistently throughout the day?**
**YES –** Awesome. Move on to question 4.
**NO –** Introduce handouts from **unit 3** in order to give ideas for how to model and what to model. Make sure the team understands the Plus One Technique. Hang up included posters if desired. Use the included Modeling Challenges to increase the number of models or minutes modeled per day. Ensure that the entire team is teaching more than they are testing.

**4 – Is the team familiar with the concept of core vocabulary?**
**YES –** Super. Move on to question 5.
**NO –** Unit 4 discusses what core vocabulary is and why it's so useful. Use handouts from this section to encourage modeling of core vocabulary more than unit specific nouns.

**5 – Are there communication opportunities presented to the AAC user consistently throughout their day? Does the team understand how to effectively prompt and elicit communication?**
**YES –** Wow! Your team is doing great and has the basics down. Use the materials (including the extras!) to reinforce concepts as needed.
**NO –** Use materials from **unit 5** to teach how to best prompt, elicit a variety of functions, and set up opportunities throughout the day.

# Month by Month
# AAC CHALLENGES

## AUGUST
## Learn the System

Goal: Familiarize self with AAC system and purpose of AAC.

## SEPTEMBER
## Access Challenge 1

Goal: System available 100% of the time.

## OCTOBER
## Modeling Challenge

Goal: Increase minutes spent modeling to 60 per day.

## NOVEMBER
## Core Vocab Challenge

Goal: Adapt activities to target core vocabulary.

## DECEMBER
## Opportunities Challenge

Goal: Set-up 100 communication opportunities per day.

## JANUARY
## Access Challenge 2

Goal: AAC user carries and transitions with system.

## FEBRUARY
## Modeling Challenge

Goal: Increase minutes spent modeling to 150 per day.

## MARCH
## Different Functions

Goal: Model at least 5 different communication functions per day.

## APRIL
## Opportunities Challenge

Goal: Set-up 200 communication opportunities per day.

## MAY
## Put It All Together

Goal: Rate yourself on your use of the four best AAC practices.

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## JUNE
## Put It All Together
Goal: Rate yourself on your use of the four best AAC practices.

# Unit One

## AAC BASICS

## GOAL:

Get familiar with AAC. Understand the different types, and why it's important.

# UNIT 1: AAC BASICS

This unit is for people who are unfamiliar with AAC. It teaches the basics including what it is, who it's for, and introduces current best practices for teaching AAC.

1) **AAC Basics Informational Handouts**
   - AAC Basics Info Handout (with unit number)
   - AAC Basics Info Handout (no number)

2) **Types of AAC**

3) **Top High and Low Tech Options**

4) **AAC Best Practices (2-pages)**

5) **AAC Intervention (Compared to Typical Language Development)**

6) **Top 5 AAC Myths**

7) **Who Benefits from AAC**

8) **All About Me and My AAC Handout** (use to get staff familiar with student)
   - Editable version included with editable forms file

9) **Learn the System Challenge**

# 1 AAC BASICS

## WHAT IS AAC:

AAC is short for augmentative and alternative communication. <u>Augmentative</u> means "to supplement" so it includes things that make communication easier such as text messaging or pointing. <u>Alternative</u> means "instead of" so it includes things that completely replace verbal communication such as a communication device or iPad.

## WHO USES IT?

AAC is all of the tools we use to communicate in addition to or instead of verbal speech so most people use AAC every day! Some individuals cannot communicate verbally or have trouble being understood so they rely on AAC to assist them. People with disabilities including autism, Down Syndrome, or cerebral palsy often benefit from AAC.

## TYPES OF AAC:

In general, there are three types of AAC.

1 – **No Tech:** Doesn't require extra equipment (e.g., pointing, gestures, facial expressions, body language, or sign language).

2 – **Low Tech:** Doesn't require a battery (e.g., picture symbol books, writing, alphabet boards).

3 – **High Tech:** Systems using technology (e.g., iPads, dedicated systems).

<u>Communication is a fundamental human right</u>. AAC is a powerful, meaningful tool!

## AND DID YOU KNOW...

AAC <u>does not</u> hurt or delay developing verbal speech. In fact, studies have shown the opposite! Access to AAC can actually <u>increase</u> verbal speech!

Millar, D. C., Light, J. C., & Schlosser, R. W. (2006).

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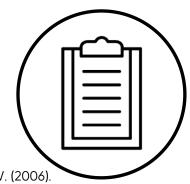
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# TYPES OF AAC:

There are three broad categories of AAC. Each is described below including some examples.

## NO TECH:

No tech AAC is communication that doesn't require any additional equipment. All of us communicate using no tech AAC every day! It includes body language, pointing, gestures, facial expressions, or even sign language. It is important for everyone to be taught and encouraged to use this type of communication.

## LOW TECH:

Low tech AAC requires additional equipment but do not use a battery. In this category is picture symbols, communication books, core vocabulary boards, and letter boards. These systems are typically cost effective and can be implemented right away, however they can be limiting. They also work well as a back-up to high tech systems.

## HIGH TECH:

High tech AAC systems utilize technology and require a battery. High tech systems are the most expensive but they are also the most robust, allowing individuals access to a bigger vocabulary and more options. Examples of high tech system include dedicated communication devices and communication apps on an iPad.

Now, reflect on the individuals you work with. What types of communication systems are they using? Is it a combination of approaches?

# TOP HIGH & LOW TECH OPTIONS

On this page, I'll briefly summarize the top low and high tech systems I see used and recommended. Please note that there are many more options than the ones presented on this page. The recommendations below are simply great places to get started if you're looking for inspiration or are new to AAC.

## LOW TECH:

### Core Vocabulary Boards or Books

There are many low-cost or free core vocabulary boards and books available online. These are often a great place to start as there's little cost to entry. Project Core (a website) is a great resource for these.

### PECS

PECS is often considered a great starting place to teach young children initiation and communicative intent. It can also serve as a stepping stone to a robust, high-tech communication device. PECS primarily focuses on requesting.

### PODD

PODD is a great system as they offer both low and high tech systems which means individuals can move between them as needed. This system provides robust language to serve a variety of communication functions, not just requesting. It can also be modified for use with a variety of access methods (e.g., partner assisted scanning).

## HIGH TECH:

### iPad Apps

There are many, many communication apps for the iPad available. My go-to apps are TouchChat with WordPower, LAMP, Proloquo2Go, Speak For Yourself, Cough Drop, and Snap + Core First.

### Dedicated Communication Devices

My go-to for dedicated devices (including eye gaze) is Tobii Dynavox.

# AAC BEST PRACTICES:

There has been a lot of research on individuals who learn to communicate using AAC. Across many studies, these four best practices have been proven to work!

Keep in mind, while becoming familiar with an AAC system might feel overwhelming or unnatural at first, the process for teaching an AAC user is very similar to how we'd teach anyone to understand and use a language.

## BEST PRACTICE #1: ACCESS

All people learning a language require access to that language. We wouldn't expect a baby to learn to talk without access to hearing and interacting with that language. We wouldn't expect a baby to learn to talk if they were only spoken to for 1 hour a day. AAC users are the same way. They need consistent access to their communication systems in order to become familiar enough to learn the system and use it.

Therefore, AAC best practice #1 is access. Our AAC users need access to their communication system all day, at all times, and in all environments. Without consistent access, the rest of the best practices will not be effective.

## BEST PRACTICE #2: MODELING

We need to expose our AAC users to language in the same way as babies learning to talk. When we find out a child isn't developing verbal language in a typical way, we want to expose them to language using a different modality. Just as you'd talk to a baby, or someone learning English, we need to talk to our AAC users in their language – on their AAC system. That means you need to use their system to say what you're thinking, what you're doing, and what you're telling them, AND what they may be thinking, what they're doing, and what they're trying to tell you.

Use the system as much as possible throughout the day. Try to get so good, that when you speak around or to the child, that you're using the system more often than you're not. There's so many different things that you can model on the communication system. You can label things around you, tell jokes, ask for things, say "hi" and "bye", request help, share information, or answer questions. As you model, you'll start to get familiar with the communication system. The second AAC best practice is modeling the system for the learner.

# AAC BEST PRACTICES:

### BEST PRACTICE #3: CORE VOCABULARY

As you model on the device, you may start to notice that you use some words much more often than others. Another "best practice" for AAC implementation is the use of core vocabulary. Core vocabulary comprises 80% of what we say and it only consists of about 200 words!

Effective AAC systems should be balanced this way. A communication system should be primarily focused on core vocabulary words such as "yes", "more", "you", "was", "on", "go", or "that". Fringe vocabulary words, or more specific words, such as "Elmo", "volcano", "Susan", "New York City", "bucket", or "pizza" should also be included on a child's communication system, however the emphasis should always be on teaching and modeling core vocabulary as those words tend to be highly flexible and versatile. The third best practice is <u>core vocabulary</u>.

### BEST PRACTICE #4: COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

As you may know, providing exposure to a language isn't often enough to learn it. We need to be given opportunities to practice using it as well! Many times, because AAC users have a different way of communicating that can be intimidating or confusing to others, they aren't given frequent opportunities to communicate. Research has shown that in order for an AAC system to be most effective, AAC users need at least 200 opportunities to use it every day. While this might seem like a lot, think about how many opportunities typical, verbal speakers have to speak in a day. The fourth and final AAC best practice is creating <u>communication opportunities</u>.

Stick with these four best practices, and with time, you'll develop confidence in your skills and become a more effective communication partner for AAC users. Seeing progress with AAC can take a lot of time and patience but remind yourself that it takes a full year of exposure before babies start talking and even longer before they put together words. Give it time and don't rush the process.

Remember, the four best practices when teaching an AAC system are...

## Access → Modeling → Core Vocabulary → Communication Opportunities

Keep the AAC system out at all times, use it to show the AAC user how it's done, focus on core vocabulary, and set up as many communication opportunities as possible!

# AAC INTERVENTION
## COMPARED TO TYPICAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

AAC intervention may feel overwhelming and unfamiliar at times. However, it's important to remember that it is similar in most ways to how you'd support a typical child who is learning language.

Look at the information below to compare strategies we'd use with a typically developing baby or infant to what best practice shows for teaching AAC:

## TYPICAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

## AAC INTERVENTION
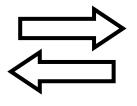
| TYPICAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT | AAC INTERVENTION |
|---|---|
| We talk to, or model language for, babies for a year before we expect their first word. | We model language using their system for a long time before expecting any words or language back. |
| Young children learn to speak in single words before being expected to use sentences. | AAC users are taught single words before they are expected to use sentences. Single words are honored. |
| Babies and children can hear their language spoken to them or around them most of their day. | AAC systems are modeled and used consistently throughout the day. |
| Babies are encouraged to babble, or play with sounds and language, in a no pressure, fun environment. They are responded to even when their vocalizations aren't full words or don't make sense. | AAC users are encouraged to play around with their systems (e.g., press buttons) in a no pressure, fun environment. What they say is responded to in a respectful, engaging way, even if it doesn't make sense. |
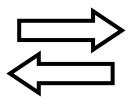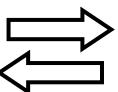
# TOP 5 AAC MYTHS:

**1**

**Myth**: I should always start with a small or easy to learn AAC system and then change it once the individual demonstrates the ability to use the system.

**Fact**: It is best practice to provide access to a robust AAC system that can grow with the individual. Learning new systems is a huge cognitive load and often requires completely starting over each time. By doing this, you are actually making it harder for the individual to become a competent language user.

**2**

**Myth**: I should limit the number of words in an AAC system based on an individual's cognitive level.

**Fact**: It is best practice to choose vocabulary size on several variables. It can be incredibly difficult to know what an individual's cognitive level is when they can't effectively communicate. Instead, try limiting the system based on what the individual can access. For example, if using a communication app on the iPad, assess to find out what size of button the individual can touch accurately. You can always 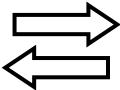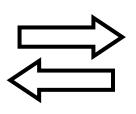"hide" vocabulary to make the system less overwhelming initially. That way, buttons don't move when you need to add vocabulary in later on.

**3**

**Myth**: I should program in new and relevant vocabulary into the system for each unit. Or, I should make separate, unique boards for different activities.

**Fact**: It is best practice to provide one consistent AAC system that the individual can use across activities and environments. Teach them how to find and use the words they already have in their system. For example, if you're reading a book about a monster, don't program in a separate folder with monster related vocabulary words. Instead, find words in their system such as "green", "scary", "stop", or "big" to describe the monster and the story.

**4**

**Myth**: Individuals need to show good behavior in order to earn their communication system.

**Fact**: Just like you wouldn't duct tape someone's mouth closed, you cannot take away their words or their ability to communicate with others based on their behavior. Instead, try to redirect or use consequences just like you would with another student who was blurting out or demonstrating inappropriate behavior.

**5**

**Myth**: We shouldn't introduce an AAC system if the we want the individual to talk verbally. It might slow them down or they'll just learn to use the device instead.

**Fact**: Research has shown that providing access to AAC does not have a negative impact on the development of verbal speech. In many studies, it actually had a positive impact! This means that many people show more verbal speech after being given access to an AAC system!

# WHO BENEFITS FROM AAC:

**Read about the children below. As you read, reflect on who would benefit from an AAC system and why.**

Xavier is a 10 year old boy who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. He communicates verbally throughout his day. He can be hard to understand at times and fatigues quickly from talking. Xavier has limited use of his hands. He is a very happy boy and has many friends.

Cecelia is a 6 year old girl who has autism and does not have any spoken language. Sometimes, when she's upset, she vocalizes but is very quiet otherwise. She has significant behaviors which include throwing items, biting, and swatting at adults and peers. She does not follow verbal directions consistently but seems to follow her daily picture schedule. She loves watching videos.

Mason is a 4 year old boy with Down Syndrome. He loves to vocalize and "talk", but most of what he says cannot be understood. He has a few words that he uses frequently such as "snack", "no", "mine", and "mom". Mason is stubborn but can follow multistep directions when he's motivated. When around his peers, he can scream or run away without warning. Mason loves books and dancing.

# ALL of the these children would likely benefit from AAC.

**Why? <u>Anyone who cannot meet their daily needs with spoken language alone</u> would likely benefit from AAC. This includes individuals who are hard to understand!**

**Please Note:** The proper AAC system should always be determined by a speech-language pathologist and taught to the AAC user using best practice (e.g., consistent access, modeling, core vocabulary).

# All About Me *and* My AAC

Name: _____

Speech-Language Pathologist: _____

AAC System: _____

How I Use It: _____

_____

## MY GOALS:

## HOW YOU CAN HELP:

**1** Make sure my communication system is out and available <u>at all times</u>.

**2** **Model on the system.** Touch keywords while you talk.

**3** **Make it fun!** Get silly! Show me that communicating is fun!

**4** Keep things **low pressure.** Don't expect responses right away.

**Please contact the speech-language pathologist with any updates, questions, or concerns!**

# LEARN THE SYSTEM CHALLENGE

Low-tech systems

**GOAL:** Get familiar with the AAC system. Know how to quickly and efficiently find the words you want.

❑ Look through the entire system. Note how many pages there are. Are there...
- ❑ Less than 2 pages?
- ❑ 2-5 pages?
- ❑ 5-10 pages?
- ❑ 10+ pages?

❑ How do you navigate between the pages? Are there...
- ❑ Icons for navigation (e.g., a "home" icon)?
- ❑ Page numbers?
- ❑ Labels for different sections?

❑ How is the AAC system organized? Are the words...
- ❑ Organized by category?
- ❑ Color-coded? If so, how? _____

❑ How would someone use the system? Would they...
- ❑ Point to the words?
- ❑ Remove the words?
- ❑ Add the words to a sentence strip?
- ❑ Use their eyes to gaze towards their choice?

**Now, pretend you cannot communicate verbally. Actually use the system as if this was true. What would you say on the system if you...**

- ❑ were thirsty and wanted a drink?
- ❑ felt sick?
- ❑ didn't want to do the activity anymore?
- ❑ were really excited about something?
- ❑ needed help?
- ❑ thought something was funny?
- ❑ wanted to greet someone (e.g., say "hello")?

**GOAL:** Get familiar with the AAC system. Know how to quickly and efficiently find the words you want.

❑ First, turn the device on and off. Practice getting the home page of the communication system up. Do this until you can do it quickly.

❑ Look at the home page.
  ❑ How many buttons are there? _____
  ❑ Is there the same number of buttons on all of the pages?
  ❑ Is there a sentence strip? If so, how do you clear it?
  ❑ Is there access to a keyboard?
  ❑ Does it look best in landscape or portrait mode?

❑ Look at the buttons closely.
  ❑ Are they color coded? If so, how? _____
  ❑ Do they have real pictures? Symbols? Words?
  ❑ Do some lead to another page? How can you tell?
  ❑ How can you navigate back to the main page from other pages?

❑ When you touch a button (not a folder), does it…
  ❑ Get added to a sentence strip?
  ❑ Say the word out loud?

**Now, pretend you cannot communicate verbally. Actually use the system as if this was true. What would you say on the system if you…**

❑ were thirsty and wanted a drink?
❑ felt sick?
❑ didn't want to do the activity anymore?
❑ were really excited about something?
❑ needed help?
❑ thought something was funny?

**Find these words. Do it a second time and see if you're faster.**

☐ hello/hi    ☐ you    ☐ go    ☐ stop    ☐ see    ☐ big

# *Unit Two*

# ACCESS

## GOAL:

Make sure individuals who could benefit from AAC have access and can use their system at all times.

# UNIT 2: ACCESS

This unit targets increasing AAC access. The contents include:

1) **Access Informational Handouts**
   - Access Info Handout (with unit number)
   - Access Info Handout (no number)

2) **My Top 6 Access Tips**

3) **Access FAQs**

4) **The Importance of Providing Access**

5) **Presuming Competence**

6) **Access Visuals + Reminders**
   - This Device Is My Voice (full size): Print full size or set printer settings to a percentage (e.g., 50%) to print smaller.
   - The Device Is My Voice (mini versions)
   - This Is My Voice (full size)
   - This Is My Voice (mini versions)

7) **Access Challenges** (can use one time or monthly for data collection/progress monitoring)
   - Access Challenge 1 – Consistent AAC access throughout the day
   - Access Challenge 2 – Encourage AAC user to move with system

**The main goal for the "Access" section is making sure that everyone who works with the AAC user knows to keep the AAC system out and accessible AT ALL TIMES.**

# 2 ACCESS

## WHAT IT IS:

"Access" means that individuals should be able to touch, interact with, and use their AAC systems. They need this access at all times, regardless of activity, behaviors, or their current skill level.  AAC systems or devices should not be left in a backpack, on a shelf, or away from the individual at any time throughout their day.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Consistent access to AAC systems is critical to learning and development. We communicate all day and individuals learning AAC systems have the same needs and rights. Without consistent access, AAC users are not given the opportunity to learn their system or demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

## TAKE ACTION:

The number one goal related to access is making sure the system is out and accessible at all times. To get in the habit of doing this, try using visuals or reminders. Make sure all team members are on the same page. Teach the individual using the AAC system to carry it and transition with it themselves if possible. Experiment with a variety of bags, carrying straps, cases, and other accessories if needed.

Individuals who use AAC need to be able to <u>access</u> their system...

## ALL DAY
## AT ALL TIMES
## IN ALL ENVIRONMENTS

# ACCESS

## WHAT IT IS:

"Access" means that individuals should be able to touch, interact with, and use their AAC systems. They need this access at all times, regardless of activity, behaviors, or their current skill level. AAC systems or devices should not be left in a backpack, on a shelf, or away from the individual at any time throughout their day.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Consistent access to AAC systems is critical to learning and development. We communicate all day and individuals learning AAC systems have the same needs and rights. Without consistent access, AAC users are not given the opportunity to learn their system or demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

## TAKE ACTION:

The number one goal related to access is making sure the system is out and accessible at all times. To get in the habit of doing this, try using visuals or reminders. Make sure all team members are on the same page. Teach the individual using the AAC system to carry it and transition with it themselves if possible. Experiment with a variety of bags, carrying straps, cases, and other accessories if needed.

Individuals who use AAC need to be able to <u>access</u> their system...

## ALL DAY
## AT ALL TIMES
## IN ALL ENVIRONMENTS

# 6 ACCESS TIPS

1. **Set up a charging station.** This is where the device will end up each night. This ensures you start the next day with a fully charged device and it doesn't get lost in the shuffle!

2. **Whenever possible, encourage the individual using the AAC system to be the one responsible for carrying it and transitioning with it.** Doing this will help them take ownership and see the system as theirs.

3. **Always consider carrying straps, cases, screen protectors, and stands.** There are so many available now. Some are waterproof, some are shockproof, and some even have built-in speakers!

4. **Use visual reminders and alarms for yourself as reminders to double check that the device is out, on, and accessible to the individual who needs it.** You don't have to use these forever, but they will help get you into a routine and make it a habit.

5. **Always have a back-up, low-tech AAC system at the ready.** Technology doesn't always cooperate and this way you'll be ready! If possible, keep the low-tech system the exact same as the high-tech version. This reduces the learning curve and cognitive demands.

6. **Use the device for communication ONLY.** Don't use it for games, books, or other purposes. If using an iPad, lock the device using Guided Access so the app can't be closed.

# ACCESS FAQs

Below, I've included more information on how I troubleshoot common issues and other FAQs related to ensuring consistent access to appropriate AAC.

- **What if the individual drops or throws their AAC system?**
  Heavy duty cases and carrying straps can go a long way in making sure devices don't get broken or thrown. Spend time researching appropriate cases and carrying devices. There are many out there!

- **What if we go somewhere (e.g., a swimming pool) where we can't bring the AAC device?**
  Try printing off a copy of the home screen or of some important pages. I do this by taking a screenshot and emailing the image to myself. Many AAC device makers offer low-tech boards for free on their website. You can print these on waterproof paper (available on Amazon!) or laminate the paper afterwards.

- **What should I do if other people don't see the importance of using the device or keeping it accessible?**
  If you work in a school, make sure access to their AAC is in their IEP. This way, you can remind staff that it is a legal obligation that students have access to their communication device <u>at all times</u>. It is not optional. Then, try using the included reminders, visuals, and the challenge sheet. Implement the system yourself so they can see it done. We're all human and it can be tricky to get into the habit of getting the device out, carrying it around, and modeling on it.

- **What if the student stims on the device, seems to be playing, or presses the same button repeatedly?**
  There are many ways to handle this. First, you should always let them do this behavior for a while before trying to extinguish it. It's completely normal to find pleasure and enjoyment over pressing buttons and seeing what happens. Many individuals learn this way! It's similar to how babies babble before they learn to formulate real words and communicate. If the behavior continues, try setting a timer for how long the individual can "stim" or "play" before getting to work or answering your question. Use visuals including first/then (e.g., first talking time, then work). You can also try setting a "delay" on the device so that the AAC user needs to hold the button for a bit longer to activate it. Always imagine what you would do if the individual was verbal. Taking away the device would be similar to duct taping someone's mouth closed because they were stimming or being loud.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING ACCESS

**Child does not appear to understand**

**Child is not given access to AAC system**

**Child is not shown how to communicate**

**Child has no opportunity to learn language**

**Child has no way to show what they know**

As illustrated in the graphic on the left, when an individual with communication difficulties isn't given access to consistent AAC, they aren't able to learn how to use language. They are often thought of as less intelligent. Many times, individuals aren't provided with access to AAC because they haven't proven they can use it. Just as we talk to a baby for many, many months (even years!) before we expect them to talk back, our AAC users deserve this opportunity.

If we abandon AAC systems, leave them in backpacks or away from the individual who needs them, how can we expect them to become competent communicators? As you can see in the graphic on the right, providing AAC access allows individuals to grow and show what they know.

**We will never know what an individual is capable of without giving them CONSISTENT ACCESS.**

**Child does not appear to understand**

**Child appears increasingly intelligent & competent**

**Child is given access to an AAC system**

**Child has opportunity to show what they know**

**Child has opportunity to learn language**

# PRESUMING COMPETENCE

Did you know that even mice perform better when the people around them *just think* they'll perform better?

For students with complex needs, it can be difficult to measure their receptive language, or how much they can understand. Because of this, it is our ethical obligation to <u>presume competence</u>. This means, we assume that the individuals we work with are capable of thinking, learning, and growing no matter what they look or act like!

## Presuming competence means...

- Having respectful interactions with individuals with communication difficulties.
- Limiting your use of hand over hand.
- Providing access to robust AAC.
- Responding to what individuals who use AAC say, even if it doesn't make sense to you at the time.
- Talking to individuals normally, not using baby talk.
- Not constantly "testing" an individual (e.g., "tell me _____", "find _____").
- Providing AAC access at all times, no excuses.

It's important that we assume competence for all of the individuals we work with. This is the least dangerous assumption because by withholding access to AAC, we are potentially doing long-term damage and creating further delays and difficulties. Remember: expectations drive opportunities. Being provided with limited opportunities only decreases the likelihood that these individuals will grow to be successful communicators.

**We need to provide access to consistent, robust language, modeling, and support for many, many years before jumping to conclusions about an individual's ability to learn language.** We give babies years of modeling before we expect them to talk clearly or have a grasp of language. Our AAC users need and deserve this opportunity as well.

# This device is
# MY VOICE
# PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT AWAY.

**This device is MY VOICE.**

**PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT AWAY.**

**This device is MY VOICE.**

**PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT AWAY.**

**This device is MY VOICE.**

**PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT AWAY.**

**This device is MY VOICE.**

**PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT AWAY.**

This is

# MY VOICE

## PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT AWAY.

This is
MY VOICE.

PLEASE DON'T
TAKE IT AWAY.

This is
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PLEASE DON'T
TAKE IT AWAY.

This is
MY VOICE.

PLEASE DON'T
TAKE IT AWAY.

This is
MY VOICE.

PLEASE DON'T
TAKE IT AWAY.

# ACCESS CHALLENGE:

**GOAL:** Have the AAC system out and accessible every hour of the day.

To do this, set 8 times during the day where you'll check in, reflect, and record data on whether the device was fully available to the AAC user or not.

| | Check-In Time | Was the system out and available the entire time? Explain if needed. | Was the system used? |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | | | |
| **2** | | | |
| **3** | | | |
| **4** | | | |
| **5** | | | |
| **6** | | | |
| **7** | | | |
| **8** | | | |

## REFLECT:

| What went well? | What was tricky? |
|---|---|
| | |

**GOAL:** Encourage the AAC user to take ownership of their AAC system and carry/transition with it.

To do this, record the level of prompting you need to give the AAC user each time they move with the AAC system. Try to give the least amount of prompting needed each time.

0 = Independent: AAC user transitioned with device with no support.

1 = Delay: Wait and give additional time.

2 = Indirect Verbal Prompt such as "What do we need?"

3 = Gesture: Point to the AAC system.

4 = Direct Verbal Prompt such as "Please grab your talker!"

5 = Physical: Hand the AAC system to the AAC user.

**Date**: _____

**Total Added Points:** _____ **/ Number of Opportunities:** _____

**AVERAGE PROMPTING NEEDED:**

**REFLECT:**

© Speechy Musings

| What went well? | What was tricky? |
|---|---|
|  |  |

# Unit Three

## MODELING

## GOAL:

Ensure that everyone who communicates with an AAC user knows how to model using the communication system.

# UNIT 3: MODELING

This unit teaches all about modeling. Modeling can also be called aided language stimulation/input.

1)   **Modeling Informational Handouts**
   • Modeling Info Handout (with unit number)
   • Modeling Info Handout (no number)

2) **Modeling FAQs**

3) **7 Modeling Tips**

4) **The Plus One Technique for AAC Modeling**

5) **4 Ways to Model**

6) **Teach More, Test Less**

7) **Modeling Reminders/Visuals/Posters** **Feel free to print them smaller or with several to a page!**

8) **Modeling Challenges**
   • Modeling Challenge 1 – Set times to model and increase daily minutes.
   • Monthly Challenges **(all of the monthly challenges include versions for the full week or only Monday-Friday)**
      • Record time spent modeling per day
      • Record number of models per day
      • Rate self based on amount of modeling done each day

**The main goal for the "Modeling" section is making sure that everyone who works with the AAC user knows what modeling is and is doing it consistently.**

# ③ MODELING

## WHAT IT IS:

"Modeling" using AAC means that you use the communication system while you talk to show how it can be used. For example, if you said "Let's go to the library", you could model "go" or "go library" on the AAC system. You can also model what you think the AAC user is thinking or trying to say!

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Learning a new language always involves a significant amount of input (listening, seeing) before you get output (speaking, using the system). Modeling helps both you and the AAC user learn the system. It helps to increase motivation and it shows that the AAC system is a valid way of communicating.

## TAKE ACTION:

Set a goal for yourself. To start, aim to model using the communication system more often than you don't every time you talk to the AAC user. Focus on key words as you speak. For example, if you say "Let's go to class" you might just model "go" or "go class" using the system. Try to model slightly above what the AAC user does on their own. Work up to modeling 100% of the time.

## Some Important Notes:

1) Consistent modeling is important even if it doesn't seem like the AAC user is paying attention.

2) Don't expect responses right away! Modeling is about exposure.

# MODELING

## WHAT IT IS:

"Modeling" using AAC means that you use the communication system while you talk to show how it can be used. For example, if you said "Let's go to the library", you could model "go" or "go library" on the AAC system. You can also model what you think the AAC user is thinking or trying to say!

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Learning a new language always involves a significant amount of input (listening, seeing) before you get output (speaking, using the system). Modeling helps both you and the AAC user learn the system. It helps to increase motivation and it shows that the AAC system is a valid way of communicating.

## TAKE ACTION:

Set a goal for yourself. To start, aim to model using the communication system more often than you don't every time you talk to the AAC user. Focus on key words as you speak. For example, if you say "Let's go to class" you might just model "go" or "go class" using the system. Try to model slightly above what the AAC user does on their own. Work up to modeling 100% of the time.

## Some Important Notes:

1) Consistent modeling is important even if it doesn't seem like the AAC user is paying attention.

2) Don't expect responses right away! Modeling is about exposure.

# MODELING FAQs

Below, I've included more information on how I troubleshoot common issues and other FAQs related to modeling on AAC systems.

- **What if the AAC user doesn't let me touch their system?**
  If it's possible, get a second copy of the system. As an example, if the student uses a communication app on the iPad, I try to have a second iPad that is used for modeling in these situations. If obtaining a duplicate system isn't possible, try taking screenshots or pictures of the most used pages. Print them out and laminate them to create a separate low-tech version. Many device manufacturers share low-tech versions of their systems online for free so try searching for that if this is a frequent issue. These low-tech images can also be printed as posters to create a large, classroom version of the AAC system. Don't force the AAC user to let you interact with their system. It is THEIR VOICE.

- **What if I'm not familiar with the communication system or don't know how to use it?**
  No problem! Modeling on the system is the best way to learn! Stumbling around on it is a fantastic time to show the AAC user how to find vocabulary and problem solve on their system. While AAC systems can be intimidating at first, it's important that we stick with it. Remember that you can always start small. Focus on a small set of basic words when you begin.

- **What should I do if the AAC user doesn't watch me model or seem interested?**
  Keep going!!! Imagine how long you'd stick with talking to a baby before they talked back. Remind yourself that modeling is all about creating an environment of immersion. Be as silly and engaging as possible, but don't worry too much if the AAC user doesn't seem very interested. They're likely picking up more than it appears. Research has shown that even when the AAC user doesn't use the system themselves, modeling can result in language gains!

- **What if all the words I want to model aren't on the system?**
  Always stick to the keywords. Don't worry about forming grammatically correct sentences or modeling every single word you say. Learn more about core vocabulary. You can model so much with very few words when they're the right words! Words like "go", "want", "stop", and "more" are powerful and can be modeled in most situations. Stick to the basics! Avoid the temptation to frequently program in additional words to an AAC system. It can become overwhelming, messy, and can be harder to learn.

# 7 MODELING TIPS

1. **Don't worry about mistakes.** Making mistakes in front of the AAC user is a great learning experience! They can learn from you how to problem solve using the device and how to find the words you want. Modeling is the best way to learn an AAC system so don't worry about making mistakes at the beginning!

2. **Start small.** If you're feeling overwhelmed, pick a couple words or phrases to model. Or, just pick a time of day to start. Starting small and build gradually over time.

3. **Involve friends and peers.** Having friends and peers model using the device (or on a copy) is a great way to increase social interaction and motivation!

4. **Don't expect a response.** Many people start modeling but stop when they don't receive responses from the AAC user.

5. **Print a copy of the device.** To make modeling easier, consider printing paper copies of important pages. You can print them on regular paper (and then laminate!) or get them printed as a poster for large group modeling.

6. **Stick to keywords.** Don't feel like you need to model every word you say. For example, if you verbally say "It's time to go to art class", you might model the words "It + time + go" while you speak.

7. **Make it fun!** Talk about engaging, motivating topics. Get silly and make using the AAC system rewarding!

# PLUS ONE TECHNIQUE

*for AAC modeling*

**When working with AAC users and modeling, it can be helpful to think about the Plus One Technique. This involves taking whatever language the AAC user produces (either verbally or on the device) and expanding on it by one word.**

If the AAC user is not yet speaking or using their AAC system, most of the time, stick to modeling single words or short motivating phrases.

If the AAC user can request "more", try modeling "want + more". Once they learn and use "want + more", expand your modeling to something like "want + more + please".

Below are some specific examples of phrases and how they can be adapted for a variety of language levels.

| Example Phrase: | One Word | Two Words | Three+ Words |
|---|---|---|---|
| Wow! Look at that! | look | look + that | wow + look + that |
| Please stop doing that. | stop | stop + do | stop + do +that |
| It's time to go. | go | time + go | it + time + go |
| Do you want to play? | want | want + play | do + you + want + play |
| I don't want to do that. | don't | don't + want | don't + want + do + that |

If they use one word, model two.

If they use two words, model three.

**Remember that you'll still continue to say the phrases verbally. You'll simply point to the keywords on the AAC system as you speak!**

# 4 WAYS TO MODEL

**If you've ever had trouble thinking of what to model, below are four different ideas that can be used at any time!**

## 1 WHAT THEY'RE DOING:

Describe what the AAC user is doing. For example, if they are jumping, you might try modeling phrases like "jump", "I jump", "silly", or "fun". You can also model emotions they may feel!

## 2 WHAT YOU'RE DOING:

Use the AAC system to talk about what you are doing and thinking. For example, if the AAC user does something good, you could model "happy", "I feel proud", or "good".

## 3 PROVIDE THE WORDS:

Watch the AAC user and provide the words for their gestures or vocalizations. For example, if they reach for a snack, you could model "want eat" or if they push something away you could model "no", "don't like", or "stop".

## 4 EXPAND ON THAT:

Expand on, or add a word to, what the AAC user says. If they use their system to say "snack", try expanding that to "eat snack", "want snack", or "like snack". Expand on things they say both verbally and with their system.

**TIP:** Don't be afraid to repeat phrases and keywords over and over. Repetition is needed for learning, especially when learning a new skill. And remind yourself, you don't need to be perfect.

# TEACH MORE, TEST LESS ⭐

Many times, after a child gets an AAC system, it can be tempting to "test" them. This handout will provide a few examples of what "testing" can look like. It will also give you some alternate ideas for what to say or expect instead.

## INSTEAD OF... ⟹ TRY THIS!

| INSTEAD OF... | TRY THIS! |
|---|---|
| "Find _____!"<br><br>"Show me _____!" | "Look! Here's _____!"<br><br>"This is how you can say _____!" |
| You need to tell me on your talker. | "You look _____".<br><br>"It looks like you want _____". |
| What do you say?<br><br>© Speechy Musings | "You could say _____". |
| Using hand-over-hand to say "my turn" for the AAC user | Model saying "my turn" or "your turn" each turn of a game. |

When you're truly teaching, you should be <u>modeling, explaining, and showing</u> the AAC user how to do it.

Testing, or asking the child to find certain words or phrases on their AAC system, should be done less than 10% of the time.

Testing a child more often than this may cause them to become frustrated, lose interest in the AAC system, or refuse to use it!

## DON'T JUST ASK THEM TO DO IT, SHOW THEM HOW.

# KEEP CALM

# AND

# MODEL

## ON THE AAC SYSTEM

# I WANT YOU



*to be*

# MODELING
## ON THE AAC SYSTEM
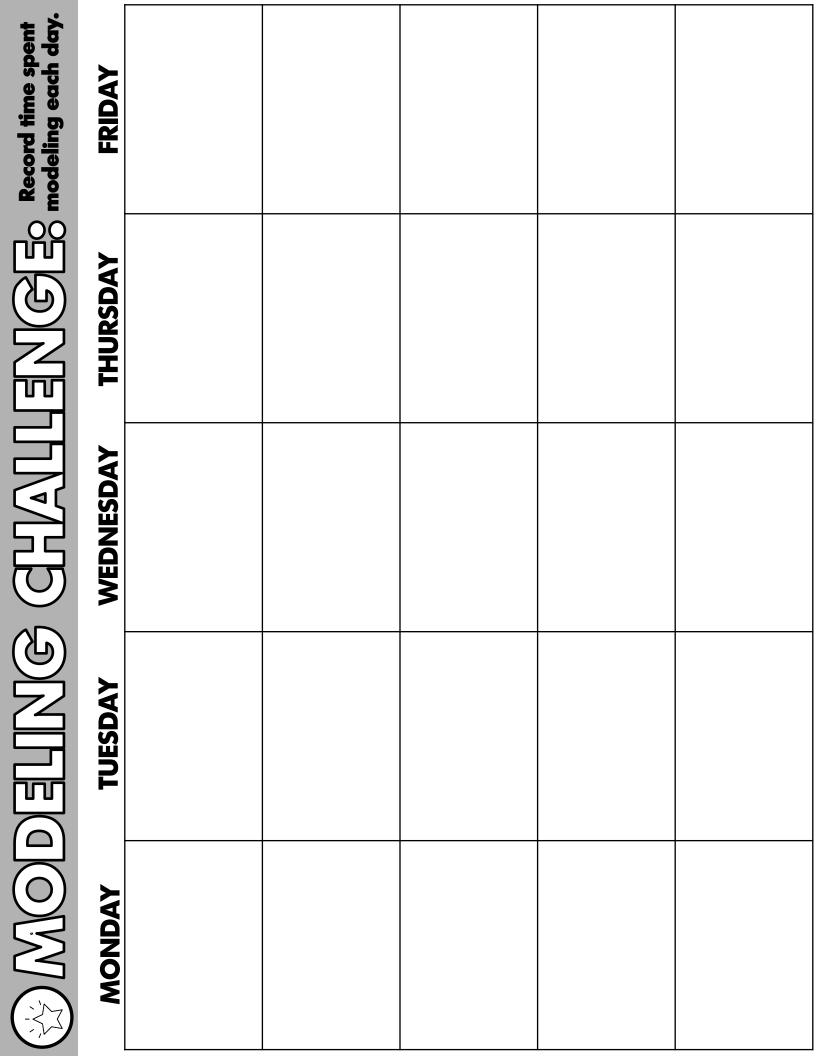
**GOAL:** Increase time spent modeling on the AAC system each day.

To do this, plan 8 times per day that you'll model using the AAC system. Think of activities you already do. Afterwards, write down how long you spent modeling.

| | Planned Time | Activity | Actual Minutes Spent Modeling |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 4 | | | |
| 5 | | | |
| 6 | | | |
| 7 | | | |
| 8 | | | |

**REFLECT:**   © Speechy Musings

**Total:** _____

| What went well? | What was tricky? |
|---|---|
| | |

# MODELING CHALLENGE:

Record time spent modeling each day.

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNES. | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--------|--------|---------|---------|----------|--------|----------|
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |

# MODELING CHALLENGE:

Record time spent modeling each day.

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY |
|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |

# MODELING CHALLENGE:
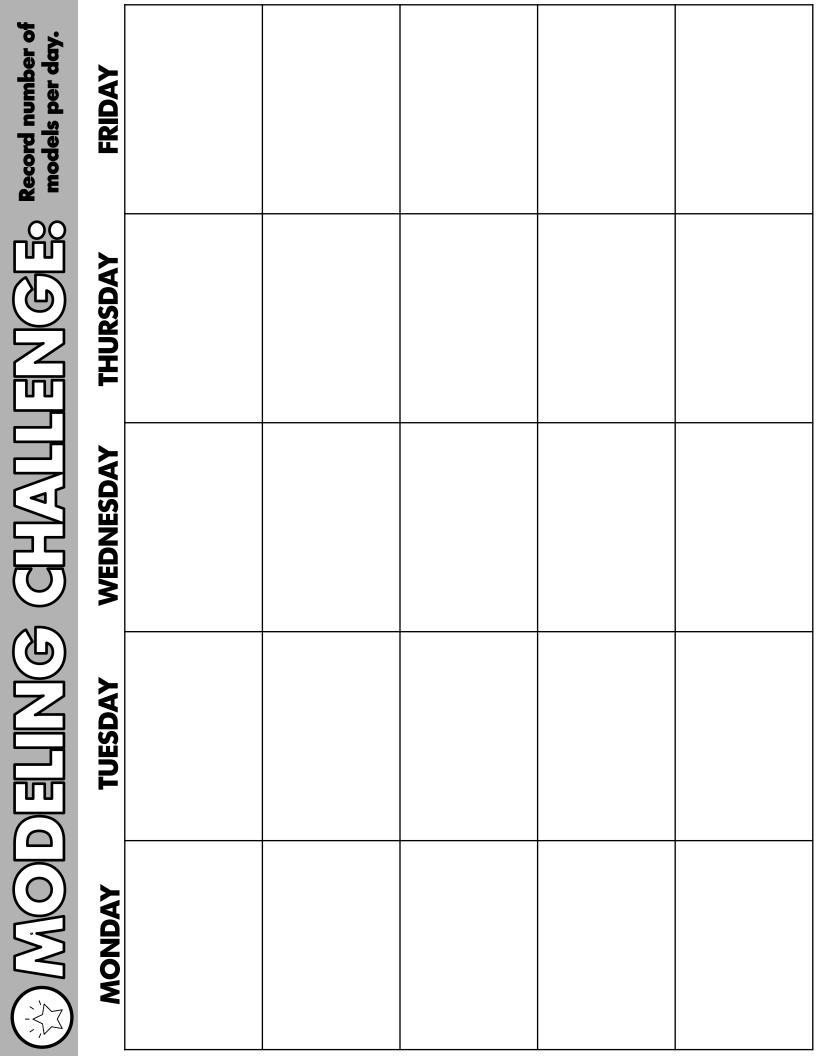
Record number of models per day.

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNES. | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--------|--------|---------|---------|----------|--------|----------|
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |

# MODELING CHALLENGE:

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY |
|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |

# MODELING CHALLENGE:

Circle how you did each day.

| | SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNES. | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 |
| | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 |
| | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 |
| | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 |
| | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 | 0 1 2 3 |

0 = Did not model     1 = Modeled a bit     2 = Modeled often     3 = Modeled consistently

# MODELING CHALLENGE:

**Record how you did each day.**

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNES. | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--------|--------|---------|---------|----------|--------|----------|
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |
|        |        |         |         |          |        |          |

**0 = Did not model     1 = Modeled a bit     2 = Modeled often     3 = Modeled consistently**

# MODELING CHALLENGE:

Record how you did each day.

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 |
| 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 |
| 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 |
| 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 |
| 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 | 0  1<br>2  3 |

0 = Did not model    1 = Modeled a bit    2 = Modeled often    3 = Modeled consistently

# ⊙ MODELING CHALLENGE:

**Record how you did each day.**

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY |
|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |
|        |         |           |          |        |

**0 = Did not model    1 = Modeled a bit    2 = Modeled often    3 = Modeled consistently**

# Unit Four
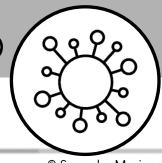
## CORE VOCABULARY

## GOAL:

Focus your efforts on teaching and modeling core vocabulary instead of situation specific words.

# UNIT 4: CORE VOCAB

This unit discusses core vocabulary including what it is, why it's important, and how to teach it:

1) **Core Vocabulary Informational Handouts**
   - Core Vocabulary Info Handout (with unit number)
   - Core Vocabulary Info Handout (no number)

2) **Core Vocabulary FAQs**

3) **Core vs Fringe**

4) **Selecting Target Words**

5) **Personal Core**

6) **The Importance of Core Vocabulary**

7) **Words You Can Model and Teach**

8) **The Top 36 Core Vocabulary Words to Teach**

9) **Descriptive Teaching**

10) **Descriptive Teaching Planning Worksheet**

11) **Core Vocabulary Words by Month**
    - Year/Level One
    - Year/Level Two
    - Year/Level Three

12) **Word of the Week Printable/Organization Page**
    - Front of worksheet
    - Back of worksheet

13) **Core Vocabulary Data Sheets (2)**

14) **Core Vocabulary Challenges (2)**

# 4 CORE VOCABULARY

## WHAT IT IS:

Core vocabulary is a small set of words that make up about 80% of what we say day to day. Some of the top words used by most people include I, yes, no, my/mine, the, want, is, it, that, a, go, you, what, on, in, here, more, out, off, some, and help. These words are highly useful, flexible, and functional.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Core vocabulary words can be combined in a variety of ways. For example, once a child learns the word "go", they can use it to say "go there", "go away", or "don't go". The word "go" can be used anywhere including at the store, at school, and at home. Contrast that with words like "volcano", "truck", or "mouse".
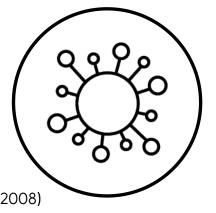
## TAKE ACTION:

Pay closer attention to the words you say and the words you hear around you. How many are core vocabulary words? Start listening for frequently used words and incorporate them in your AAC modeling. Encourage the AAC users you work with to learn and use core vocabulary words. Reduce the amount of activity specific or fringe words (e.g., book specific vocabulary words) you model or teach.

## In recent research on core vocabulary, researchers found that...

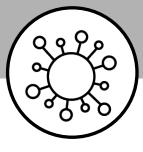...in toddlers, only 23 different words made up 96% of what they said!  (Banajee, 2003)

...in students aged 5-8, 163 different words accounted for 70% of their writing samples and just 39 of those words accounted for 50%!  (Clendon, 2008)

# CORE VOCABULARY

## WHAT IT IS:

Core vocabulary is a small set of words that make up about 80% of what we say day to day. Some of the top words used by most people include I, yes, no, my/mine, the, want, is, it, that, a, go, you, what, on, in, here, more, out, off, some, and help. These words are highly useful, flexible, and functional.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Core vocabulary words can be combined in a variety of ways. For example, once a child learns the word "go", they can use it to say "go there", "go away", or "don't go". The word "go" can be used anywhere including at the store, at school, and at home. Contrast that with words like "volcano", "truck", or "mouse".

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Pay closer attention to the words you say and the words you hear around you. How many are core vocabulary words? Start listening for frequently used words and incorporate them in your AAC modeling. Encourage the AAC users you work with to learn and use core vocabulary words. Reduce the amount of activity specific or fringe words (e.g., book specific vocabulary words) you model or teach.

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...in students aged 5-8, 163 different words accounted for 70% of their writing samples and just 39 of those words accounted for 50%! (Clendon, 2008)

# CORE VOCAB FAQs

Below, I've included more information on how I troubleshoot common issues and other FAQs related to ensuring consistent access to appropriate AAC.

- **What if the AAC user doesn't seem interested in core vocabulary words?**
  Stick with it! For students that seem overwhelmed by too many words at once, model fewer words. For students that don't communicate purposefully, teach a few highly motivating words at the same time you teach core vocabulary words. It will make the system seem more fun!  Keep things fun, light, and low pressure. Always consider what will make the AAC user feel successful and that communicating with others is worth it.

- **Aren't core vocabulary words too hard for some of my AAC users to learn and understand?**
  Many professionals mistakenly believe that core vocabulary words are too difficult or abstract for students with significant disabilities to learn. This not currently supported by research. Research has shown that core vocabulary is possible for students of all cognitive abilities to use and learn.

- **Should an AAC system only have core vocabulary words on it?**
  Not at all! A system should always be balanced. This means it should include core vocabulary AND words that are specific to the individual. In a perfect world, a system should include about 90% core vocabulary words and 10% individual specific words. Obviously this will vary a lot depending on the individual, but it's important that the AAC system is robust and relies on motor memory principles as much as possible.

- **Should we be modeling all core vocabulary words throughout the day or stick to a few a week or month?**
  It depends on the AAC user and on the team. For some users, it can be overwhelming to model too many words at once. Some professionals feel the same way! For others, they'd prefer to model more organically. They feel like it's more difficult to keep track of different words each week and try to make them work with the activities planned. See what works best for each team you're part of! You can always mix up how you teach words later so the most important part is just getting started and seeing what works! In my experience, I've found that the more experienced a person is with AAC and modeling, the less they seem to want specific words each week or month.

# CORE VS FRINGE

In general terms, core vocabulary is a set of words that we use most often. Fringe vocabulary consists mostly of nouns that we use in specific activities.

Compare the vocabulary selected in the examples below. With the "fringe focus", the student is being encouraged to learn words that are specific to each activity or class. In the second "core focus" example, the student is learning flexible, functional words that they can use anywhere.

## FRINGE FOCUS:

| Art | Recess | Science | Lunch | Reading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • red paint<br>• brush<br>• paper | • basketball<br>• dunk<br>• hoop | • volcano<br>• lava<br>• island | • pizza<br>• burger<br>• money | • fish<br>• ocean<br>• seaweed |

## CORE FOCUS:

| Art | Recess | Science | Lunch | Reading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • make<br>• want<br>• help | • go<br>• good<br>• up | • big<br>• hot<br>• it | • eat<br>• like<br>• that | • look<br>• you<br>• again |

Instead of teaching unit specific words like "volcano" or "lava", the student is now being taught more <u>flexible, functional</u> words. Instead of labeling items (e.g., "What is it?" → "Volcano"), they can describe them instead (e.g., "Tell me about the volcano!" → "It is big, hot"). These words will continue to be so much more useful for them in the future!

### Ask yourself, which words from the boxes above did you use today?

It's important to note that for some students, teaching 15 words per day is overwhelming and not practical. In those situations, consider modeling and teaching a small set of core vocabulary words each day. For example, you might model "go", "like", and "stop" heavily in all classes for an entire month.

# SELECTING TARGET WORDS

Deciding which words to teach, model, and target can be confusing! Below are 5 questions that you should ask yourself before selecting vocabulary to teach.

## When choosing words, consider...

**1**

### How many times today, or in the past week, have YOU used that word?

Given that we have limited time with our students and progress can be slow at times, stick to words they'll use frequently. Reflect on words YOU or others use frequently.

**2**

### How likely is it that the AAC user will need to use this word in the future?

Think about whether or not they will need the word tomorrow, next week, next year, or five years from now.

**3**

### Is this word useful outside of school?
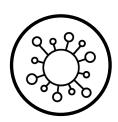
Do you think they will use this word at home? What about at the park? Consider the top places they spend time and what words would be the most useful.

**4**

### What words would a very young toddler or child use in this situation or activity?

Keep in mind that the most used words from toddlers are "a", "all done", "go", "help", "here", "I", "in", is", "it", and "mine".

In general, stick to teaching and modeling words that give you the most "bang for your buck". Think big and long-term for the individual. Don't spin your wheels teaching new vocabulary words each unit when few of them are sticking!

# PERSONAL CORE

**While access to core vocabulary is critical for language development, AAC users also need access to "personal core".**

Personal core vocabulary words are fringe vocabulary words that a specific person uses often. They include high frequency words that are specific to that individual. It may include their favorite TV show, their sister's name, a food they eat every day, or a song that always make them smile.

---

## In general, it's a good idea to prioritize teaching and modeling vocabulary words in this order:

1) **Core Vocabulary** such as go, like, stop, want, that, and again.
2) **Personal Core Vocabulary** such as the names of favorite people, activities, or places.
3) **Fringe Vocabulary** such as volcano, mouse, fraction, or crayon.

---

**After looking at the conversation below, you'll see how many core vocabulary words someone may use compared to fringe vocabulary. While it's important they have access to motivating words like "Emily" and "school", it doesn't comprise the majority of what they say.**

"How was <u>school</u> today?"

"It was okay. <u>Emily</u> told <u>Marcus</u> that she didn't like him."

"That's not good! What did your <u>teacher</u> do?"

"<u>Emily</u> has to stay in for recess all week!"

> **While access to personal core vocabulary is important, if AAC users only know and use these types of words, their communication will likely be confusing. For example, if a student only says "pizza", you may not understand if they mean "I want pizza", "I had pizza for dinner last night", or "I like pizza". Core vocabulary is critical to filling in these gaps!**

**All AAC users should have access to core and personal core vocabulary! It's important to keep things balanced & motivating!**

# THE IMPORTANCE OF
# CORE VOCABULARY

**If you're not already sold on core vocabulary, here are my top 3 perks of using and focusing on core vocabulary:**

1) **There's no need for constant AAC programming.** You get to set up functional, core vocabulary based boards and pages and use them for an extended period of time. This allows you to do effective intervention in less time!

2) **AAC users don't have to start over** with each unit, grade, or subject. They get so many more repetitions of a smaller set of words.

3) **AAC users get to benefit from motor memory** to find the words they want faster (just like you and I use a keyboard on a computer) because the words never move locations on their boards.

Systematically modeling and teaching core vocabulary words allows you to **teach for an individual's long term success** instead of getting stuck in the cycle of teaching unit-by-unit or activity-by-activity vocabulary words.

Creating new vocabulary boards can be exhausting for families, professionals, and AAC users. It results in spending a lot of time and effort on teaching vocabulary words that are no longer functional in a few weeks or months. Words often get moved around and progress can be slow.

Focus on a consistent set of core vocabulary not only saves you time but it also **decreases the cognitive load** for AAC users. Many symbols can be hard to distinguish from one another, so motor memory (keeping buttons in the same place) is a critical component of teaching AAC.

**Core vocabulary allows you to introduce highly functional, flexible words that you can model, teach, and use for years to come.**

# WORDS YOU CAN
# MODEL and TEACH

## DURING TRANSITIONS
or when moving between rooms or activities.

- Go
- Hi
- Bye
- Come
- Done
- Where
- Look
- Put
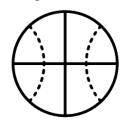
## WHILE EATING
snack or lunch

- Eat
- Want
- Like
- Not
- More
- Get
- Open
- What

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## WHEN PLAYING
a game, out at recess, or with a friend.

- Mine
- Turn
- You
- Good
- Play
- Like
- Again
- Here

# THE TOP 36
## CORE VOCABULARY WORDS TO TEACH

1. Want
2. Like
3. Stop
4. Go
5. More
6. Help
7. I
8. You
9. It
10. Finished
11. Open
12. Good

13. Look
14. Turn
15. On
16. Up
17. In
18. Can
19. Do
20. Put
21. Here
22. There
23. He
24. She
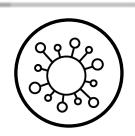
25. Down
26. Big
27. Away
28. All
29. Some
30. Make
31. That
32. Who
33. What
34. Where
35. When
36. Why

Think of how many different things you could say with just these 36 words!

# DESCRIPTIVE TEACHING

**Descriptive teaching is a method developed by Gail Van Tatenhove. It allows AAC users to practice using core vocabulary words while engaging with classroom content.**

## The benefits from descriptive teaching are...

1) It allows AAC users to engage with and learn <u>any</u> content.
2) It lessens the load on AAC programming.
3) Words on the AAC system rarely change and don't move locations.
4) A smaller set of words gets more practice.

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Most educational units come with key vocabulary words which are usually specific nouns (e.g., peninsula, Mayan culture, bacteria cell). Sometimes, professionals may try to add these words into an AAC system. The problem with this is that you end up constantly adding words that the AAC user will not need long-term.

Instead, try flipping the script and asking open-ended questions. Work on describing using words the AAC user already has access to.

| OLD WAY | | DESCRIPTIVE TEACHING | TARGET CORE WORDS: |
|---|---|---|---|
| What is the hottest planet in our solar system? | Venus | Tell me what you know about Venus. | it, is, hot, circle/round |
| What animals live in Africa? | elephants, rhino, lion | Describe an elephant. | big, gray, drink, water |
| What do bears do in the winter? | hibernate | What is another word for hibernate? | sleep |

**As you can see, the words on the far right are much more functional and will be used more frequently throughout a person's life.**

# DESCRIPTIVE TEACHING
# PLANNING WORKSHEET

**Use this worksheet each unit to plan which core vocabulary words you can use to describe curricular vocabulary words.**

| Curricular Word or Concept | Core Vocabulary Words to Target (what words are already on the AAC system that can you use to describe the curricular word or concept?) |
|---|---|
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

# CORE VOCABULARY
## By Month

### AUGUST
- All done
- Mine
- More
- Go

### SEPTEMBER
- Good
- Away
- In
- Want

### OCTOBER
- I
- Stop
- Down
- Little

### NOVEMBER
- Help
- Like
- Here
- It

### DECEMBER
- You
- What
- That
- Big

### JANUARY
- Do
- Again
- Out
- My

### FEBRUARY
- Get
- On
- Eat
- There

### MARCH
- Off
- Put
- Turn
- Up

### APRIL
- Some
- Put
- Read
- Now

### MAY
- Feel
- Look
- All
- Play

# CORE VOCABULARY
## By Month

## AUGUST
- Where
- Tell
- Bad
- Me

## SEPTEMBER
- Who
- Sad
- Make
- Drink

## OCTOBER
- Why
- Not
- Come
- Happy

## NOVEMBER
- Don't
- Can
- Different
- Slow

## DECEMBER
- Under
- Please
- Love
- Hi

## JANUARY
- Ready
- Silly
- Fun
- Give

## FEBRUARY
- Walk
- Your
- Know
- Later

## MARCH
- Say
- Same
- Ask
- Is

## APRIL
- Have
- Sorry
- Take
- Fast

## MAY
- Let
- Try
- When
- After

# CORE VOCABULARY
## By Month

## AUGUST
- Almost
- Color
- Did
- Pretty

## SEPTEMBER
- We
- Hungry
- Over
- Start

## OCTOBER
- Need
- They
- Tired
- For

## NOVEMBER
- He
- Sit
- Nice
- Guess

## DECEMBER
- Those
- With
- Write
- Win

## JANUARY
- Bye
- Other
- Leave
- Lose

## FEBRUARY
- Listen
- Before
- Hot
- How

## MARCH
- She
- Sick
- Thank you
- Think

## APRIL
- Work
- These
- Live
- Job

## MAY
- Problem
- Idea
- Time
- Together

# WORD OF THE WEEK:

## IDEAS FOR MODELING:

## HOW TO FIND IT:

## WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

## HOW WE PLAN TO MODEL/USE IT THIS WEEK:

Name: _____ Date: _____

## WORD OF THE WEEK:

# DATA

| | **M** | **T** | **W** | **TH** | **F** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Modeled** | | | | | |
| **Used With Prompt** | | | | | |
| **Used Indepe-ndently** | | | | | |

**Remember: Use the least amount of prompting needed.**
Wait Time → Use Your Body Language → Indirect Comment → Direct Comment → Model

## Did the AAC user...

Attend to modeling?  1  2  3  4  5

Use the word of the week?  1  2  3  4  5

Independently use their system?  1  2  3  4  5

Navigate to the word?  1  2  3  4  5

1 = Never    2 = Rarely    3 = Sometimes/Inconsistently    4 = Often    5 = Most of the time

# CORE VOCABULARY DATA SHEET:

| What prompt was given? | WORD 1: | WORD 2: | WORD 3: | WORD 4: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **No Prompt (independent use)** | | | | |
| **Wait Time** | | | | |
| **Body Language** | | | | |
| **Indirect Comment** | | | | |
| **Direct Comment** | | | | |
| **Model** | | | | |
| **Physical Prompt (hand UNDER hand)** | | | | |

# CORE VOCABULARY DATA SHEET:

| ACTIVITY | WORD 1: | WORD 2: | WORD 3: | WORD 4: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**Remember: Use the least amount of prompting needed.**

Wait Time → Body Language → Indirect Comment → Direct Comment → Model → Physical Prompt

# CORE VOCABULARY DATA SHEET:

Name: _____    Date: _____

| What prompt was given? | WORD 1: | WORD 2: | WORD 3: | WORD 4: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **No Prompt (independent use)** | | | | |
| **Wait Time** | | | | |
| **Body Language** | | | | |
| **Indirect Comment** | | | | |
| **Direct Comment** | | | | |
| **Model** | | | | |
| **Physical Prompt (hand UNDER hand)** | | | | |

# CORE VOCABULARY DATA SHEET:

Name: _____     Date: _____

| ACTIVITY | WORD 1: | WORD 2: | WORD 3: | WORD 4: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**Remember: Use the least amount of prompting needed.**
Wait Time → Body Language → Indirect Comment → Direct Comment → Model → Physical Prompt

# CORE VOCAB CHALLENGE:

**GOAL:** Plan for how to adapt activities in order to model, practice, and teach core vocabulary words.

To do this, identify 5 activities and then come up with targeted core vocabulary words for each. What words can you elicit and model?

| | Activity | Target Core Vocabulary | Done? |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | | | |
| **2** | | | |
| **3** | | | |
| **4** | | | |
| **5** | | | |

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## REFLECT:

| What went well? | What was tricky? |
|---|---|
| | |

# CORE VOCAB CHALLENGE:

**GOAL:** Increase modeling and use of targeted core vocabulary words.

Write four core vocabulary words in the box in the left column. Then, record checkmarks for each time you model or when the AAC user uses the word.

| Word | | Data | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **M** | | **M =** |
| | **P** | | **P =** |
| | **I** | | **I =** |
| | **M** | | **M =** |
| | **P** | | **P =** |
| | **I** | | **I =** |
| | **M** | | **M =** |
| | **P** | | **P =** |
| | **I** | | **I =** |
| | **M** | | **M =** |
| | **P** | | **P =** |
| | **I** | | **I =** |

M = Model      P = Student used word with prompt      I = Student used word independently

# REFLECT:

**What went well and what was tricky?**

# Unit Five

## COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES
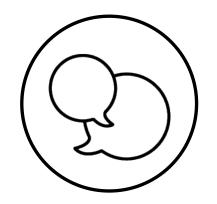
## GOAL:

Consistently provide communication opportunities for all students who use AAC throughout their day.

This unit targets increasing communication opportunities. The contents include:

1) **Communication Opportunities Informational Handouts**
   - Communication Opportunities Handout (with unit number)
   - Communication Opportunities Handout (no number)

2) **Communication Functions Intro**

3) **Communication Functions – Examples & How to Target**

4) **Communication Functions Data Sheets**

5) **Prompting Hierarchy**

6) **Ideas for How to Elicit Communication**

7) **Elicitation Posters**

8) **Creating Communication Opportunities Handouts**
   - Communication Opportunities During Book Reading
   - Communication Opportunities During Transitions
   - Communication Opportunities While Watching Videos
   - Communication Opportunities During Any Activity

9) **15 Communication Opportunity Ideas**

10) **Communication Opportunities Challenge**

11) **Functions Challenges**
   - Level One - Modeling
   - Level Two – Use

# 5 COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

## WHAT THEY ARE:

Communication opportunities are the times of the day when the AAC user is given an opportunity to interact meaningfully using their AAC system. These opportunities can have many different functions including talking with a friend, asking for something, answering a question, or telling someone what to do.

## WHY THEY'RE IMPORTANT:

Using an AAC system within meaningful, motivating communication opportunities leads to increased success and progress. Communication opportunities show AAC users what communication is all about! You can get what you want, connect with others, and express your thoughts and feelings.

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## TAKE ACTION:

Research has shown that AAC users need at least 200 communication opportunities EVERY DAY in order to learn to use their system well. These opportunities should target a variety of different functions such as getting attention ("look at me!"), requesting information ("when is lunch?"), sharing information ("I went to the beach"), teasing ("you're silly"), and protesting ("I don't want to").

## DID YOU KNOW....

There are only 4 reasons why people communicate!

(Light, 1998)

### People communicate to...

1. Express wants/needs
2. Get & share information
3. Build relationships
4. Engage in social etiquette

**Set up communication opportunities for each reason every day!**

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# COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS

## Communication is more than just requesting!

People use language for many different functions and purposes. We can...

**ASK QUESTIONS**   **COMPLAIN**   **SHARE AN OPINION**

**GIVE DIRECTIONS**   **USE HUMOR**

**USE SELF-TALK**   **TELL A STORY**   **COMPLIMENT OTHERS**

It might be tempting to stick to requesting, such as "I want _____", before moving onto teaching other functions but doing this only limits the language skills of AAC users.

Read the table below for vocabulary ideas that you can teach in order to expand the communicative functions our AAC users are exposed to.

| Function | Example Vocabulary |
|---|---|
| Get Attention | look, at, me, that, see, play, now, see |
| Tell a Story | now, yesterday, funny, mom, say, silly, pretend, story, last |
| Ask a Question | who, what, time, when, where, why, how, explain |
| Reject Something | no, don't like, not, stop, go, away, enough, done |
| Express an Opinion | I, think, you, good, bad, not, love, fun, boring |

**Incorporating a variety of types of communication will make learning AAC more fun, engaging, and motivating!**

# COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS

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| Function | Example(s) | Ideas for Targeting |
|---|---|---|
| **Requesting** | I want to go home. Can I have a pencil? | Withhold necessary items while doing a game, craft, or activity. Order food for lunch. |
| **Commenting** | This is fun. I don't like this game. | Describe ongoing activities (e.g., fun, boring, good) including opinions (I like this/don't like this). |
| **Getting Attention** | Hey! Look at me! Watch this! | Model words such as "look" or "watch" when it appears the AAC user seeks attention. Reward them with attention for using their words! |
| **Labeling** | I see a book. There's a big tree. | Look around you and label what you see. Play "I Spy" in different rooms or places. |
| **Expressing Feelings** | I'm hungry. I feel upset. | Model your own feelings throughout the day. Label how the AAC user appears to feel. |
| **Engaging in Social Routines** | How are you? I'm good What's your name? | Set up times throughout the day to practice conversation skills. For example, ask them how they feel each morning. |
| **Telling About Experiences** | Something cool happened last night! We got a new cat! | Get pictures from times when the AAC user wasn't with you (e.g., over the weekend). Model while talking about them! |
| **Answering Questions** | What's your favorite food? → Pizza How old are you? → 5 | Have a question of the week. Model while answering it for yourself. Read books and answer questions about the pictures or text. |
| **To Reject or Refuse** | No! Stop that! I don't want to! I'm all done. | Present undesired activities/items. Model words like "stop", "done", "no", and "don't" as often as possible. |

# COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS DATA SHEET:

| | Modeled | Used with Prompt | Used Independently |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Requested** | | | |
| **Commented** | | | |
| **Gained Attention** | | | |
| **Labeled** | | | |
| **Expressed Feelings** | | | |
| **Engaged in Social Routines** | | | |
| **Told About Experiences** | | | |
| **Answered Questions** | | | |
| **Refused or Rejected Something** | | | |

# COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS DATA SHEET:

Name: _____  Date: _____

| | Modeled | Used with Prompt | Used Independently |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Requested** | | | |
| **Commented** | | | |
| **Gained Attention** | | | |
| **Labeled** | | | |
| **Expressed Feelings** | | | |
| **Engaged in Social Routines** | | | |
| **Told About Experiences** | | | |
| **Answered Questions** | | | |
| **Refused or Rejected Something** | | | |

# PROMPTING:

Research has shown that prompting as little as is needed may be an effective way to teach the use of AAC systems. One effective method is building from the least support up to the most support as needed. To do this, after you provide a direction, prompt, or cue, continue with systematically increased supports. **Make sure to wait at least 15 seconds after each prompt to allow for processing time**.

**Wait**
- **Pause expectantly** in order to give the AAC user time to process and think of what they want to say.

**Use Your Body**
- Use your body to communicate.
- **Look at the system. Then, point to the system or symbol.**

**Indirect**
- Say something indirect.
- "I wonder what you're thinking" or "Hmm… now what?".

**Direct**
- Directly tell the AAC user to communicate on their system or give them a sentence starter.
- "Tell me what you want" or "You want to eat…".

**Model**
- Model what the AAC user could/should have said.
- "I think it's _____" or "You could tell me _____".

## If there's still no response, move on and try again later.

Keep things low pressure and keep up the modeling! Try to increase motivation by incorporating their interests or by making the activity more fun!

# IDEAS FOR HOW TO
# ELICIT COMMUNICATION

**1** **Model, model, model.**
Model the target many times (at least 100) and for an extended period of time (at least a week) first.

**2** **Get their attention.**
Make the activity fun! Be engaging and appeal to their interests.

**3** **Insert a pause.**
After each request, question, or model, pause while you count slowly to 15.

**4** **Provide the response.**
After a long pause, prompt them to answer. If they don't, provide the response yourself! Show them what they could have said.

**5** **Talk to yourself.**
Even if they don't say anything, keep the conversation going! Use their AAC system to talk to yourself like you might with a baby or young child. Model self-questioning and self-talk.

# MODEL

WAIT
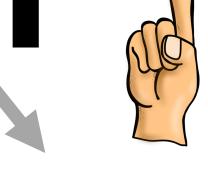
# PROMPT

WAIT
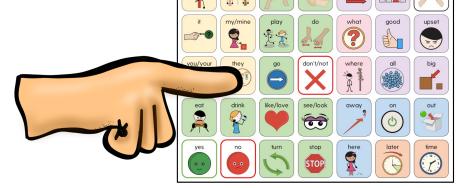
# RESPOND

"I think it's…"

"It looks like you're thinking…"

# MODEL

Say it using AAC.

# WAIT

Pause for at least 15 seconds.

# PROMPT

Signal that it's their turn to talk.

Then pause and move on.

# DURING BOOK READING

## Introduce the book.

**1**

### WHAT TO DO:
- Get their attention. Point to and talk about the cover.
- Refer to their schedule (if used).
- Give them as much control as possible.

### WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:
- "Look!"
- "We're going to read a book!"
- "It looks fun/silly/scary!"
- "Let's open the book!"

## Read the book.

**2**

### WHAT TO DO:
- Read the text or just make up your own silly version.
- Point to and describe the pictures & actions in the book.

### WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:
- Model book reading vocabulary such as "turn the page" or "read it".
- Model keywords from the text in the book as you read.

**EXAMPLES:**  "Wow! That's a big dragon!"   "He wants to go home."

## Reflect on and rate the book.

**3**

### WHAT TO DO:
- Talk about whether you liked the book or not.
- Describe what happened in the book using core vocabulary.
- Retell your favorite parts.

### WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:
- Like/not like
- Fun/silly/boring/scary
- I loved when…
- My favorite part was…

## Tips to Increase Engagement:
1) Be silly, fun, and engaging! Use different voices and exaggerate your body language.
2) Read books that incorporate their interests.
3) Provide props and visuals.  Increase structure and predictability within the activity.
4) After you model, pause for at least 15 seconds and give them the opportunity to respond.

# DURING TRANSITIONS

| | **Prepare and foreshadow.** | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **WHAT TO DO:**<br>• Refer to their schedule (if used).<br>• Foreshadow when the transition will happen.<br>• Pause after you model so they can answer/respond. | **WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:**<br>• "It's <u>time</u> for _____."<br>• "We're going to <u>walk</u> to math."<br>• "Let's <u>go</u>."<br>• "<u>First</u> <u>clean</u> up, <u>then</u> <u>go</u> to math". |

| | **Transition.** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2** | **WHAT TO DO:**<br>• Give specific and clear directions.<br>• Describe what you're doing.<br>• Give them a job (greeting peers, introducing the activity). | **TRANSITION VOCABULARY:**<br>• First<br>• Then<br>• Go<br>• Stop<br>• Different | • Time<br>• Now<br>• Help<br>• Walk<br>• Feel _____ |

| | **Reinforce and provide feedback.** | |
|---|---|---|
| **3** | **WHAT TO DO:**<br>• Repeat directions and help them get settled.<br>• Provide feedback.<br>• Refer to their schedule again to remind them of what is next. | **WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:**<br>• "<u>You</u> did <u>good</u>!"<br>• "Thanks for <u>walking</u> <u>quietly</u>."<br>• "Now it's <u>time</u> to <u>sit</u>."<br>• "<u>Look</u> at what's next". |

**Tips to Increase Cooperation:**
1) Provide visuals, foreshadowing, timers, and clear expectations.
2) Use first/then language (first we walk, then we sit in our chair OR first math, then lunch).
3) Give them a meaningful transition object (can you bring this book to math class?).
4) Share control and give choices when possible (do you want to walk or crawl?).

# WHILE WATCHING VIDEOS

## Pick out and introduce video.

**1**

### WHAT TO DO:
- Give them the option to pick out a video of their choice.
- Get their attention. Point to and talk about the video.
- Refer to their schedule (if used).

### WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:
- "<u>What</u> one do <u>you</u> <u>want</u>?"
- "We're going to <u>watch</u> a <u>video</u>!"
- "It looks <u>cool</u>/<u>funny</u>/<u>scary</u>!"
- "<u>Turn</u> it <u>on</u>."

## Watch the video.

**2**

### WHAT TO DO:
- Watch the video. Describe what happens throughout.
- Pause the video. Describe the scene.
- Make predictions.

### EXAMPLE PHRASES TO MODEL:
- "Look at the _____".
- "He/she is _____".
- "I think they will _____".
- "This is _____".

## Rate the video and discuss.

**3**

### WHAT TO DO:
- Talk about whether you liked the video or not.
- Describe what happened in the video using core vocabulary.
- Retell your favorite parts.

### WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:
- <u>Like</u>/<u>not like</u>
- <u>Funny</u>/<u>silly</u>/<u>boring</u>/<u>scary</u>/<u>bad</u>
- I <u>loved</u> when…
- My favorite part was…

**Tips to Increase Engagement:**
1) Be silly, fun, and engaging! Use different voices and exaggerate your body language.
2) Read books that incorporate their interests.
3) Provide props and visuals. Increase structure and predictability within the activity.
4) After you model, pause for at least 15 seconds and give them the opportunity to respond.

creating communication opportunities
# DURING ANY ACTIVITY

## Pick out and introduce activity.

**1**

### WHAT TO DO:
- Get their attention. Talk about what you're doing to do.
- Refer to their schedule (if used).
- Give them control and choices.
- Set expectations.

### EXAMPLE PHRASES TO MODEL:
- "Look! Let's _____!"
- "What do you want to do?"
- "This looks fun/silly/scary!"
- "We're going to _____."

## Do the activity.

**2**

### WHAT TO DO:
- Describe what you're doing.
- Model keywords from what you say out loud.
- Model language they might be thinking or could use.

### EXAMPLE PHRASES TO MODEL:
- I want…
- Help me.
- My turn.
- Go away.
- Time to go.
- Do it again.
- Good job!
- I think…
- I feel…
- Not that!

## Reflect on and rate the activity.

**3**

### WHAT TO DO:
- Model phrases to request being all done/finished.
- Talk about whether you liked the activity or not.
- Describe what you did.

### EXAMPLE PHRASES TO MODEL:
- I'm done. Different game please!
- Like/not like
- Easy/hard/fun/silly/boring/scary
- I loved it when…

## Tips to Increase Engagement:
1) Be silly, fun, and engaging! Use different voices and exaggerate your body language.
2) Incorporate their interests or use motivating items/toys.
3) Provide props and visuals. Increase structure and predictability within the activity.
4) After you model, pause for at least 15 seconds and give them the opportunity to respond.

# 15 COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITY IDEAS

1. **Surveys** – Come up with a question of the day or week. Have the AAC user ask the question and keep track of how many people chose each option.

2. **Greeting Peers** – Designate a time of day or class for the AAC user to greet peers.  Or, walk around the building and greet people (e.g., custodian, office staff, peers).

3. **Scavenger Hunt** – Hide pictures or items around and go looking for them. Label what you find or ask questions to figure out where they are.

4. **Talking About a Book** – Read a motivating book. Talk about the pictures.

5. **Withhold Items** – Do an engaging craft, game, or activity. Withhold a necessary item so the AAC user has to ask for it.

6. **Make a Choice** – Provide frequent choices such as marker color, book preference, where to sit, or which way to walk.

7. **During Transitions** – Before leaving any room, discuss where you're going using the word "go".

8. **Mail Delivery** – Pick up staff mail and deliver it to their rooms.

9. **I Spy** – Give clues to things you see (e.g., "I spy/see red") and have the AAC user try to find what you're describing.

10. **Watching Videos** – Pull up YouTube and have the AAC user tell you what they want to watch (e.g., cat, ski, hot). There's tons of funny animal videos!

11. **Preplanned Messages** – Get information about class activities ahead of time. Prepare and practice the activity with the AAC user ahead of time so they can participate.

12. **Drawing** – Let the AAC user draw and/or tell you what to draw. Describe what you drew.

13. **Coffee Station/Cart** – Set up a coffee station program. Have the AAC user sell coffee (or other snacks) at specific times during the day.

14. **Show & Tell** – Do a show and tell using motivating items (from home if needed). Have the AAC user describe the item, why they like it (or don't!), and what they do with it.

15. **Snack & Mealtimes** – Describe what you're eating. Is it "good", "bad", or "hot"? Did they "like" it or not?

# COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES:

**GOAL:** Identify times during the day that you can increase or set up communication opportunities.

To do this, brainstorm 5 times that the AAC user could have consistent communication opportunities. Then, check whether it was done or not. Reflect.

| | Time or Class | Activity | Target Vocab/What They Could Say | Done? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | | | | |
| **2** | | | | |
| **3** | | | | |
| **4** | | | | |
| **5** | | | | |

## REFLECT:

| What went well? | What was tricky? |
|---|---|
| | |

# FUNCTIONS CHALLENGE:

**GOAL:** Increase the modeling of a wide variety of different communication functions.

See how many different communication functions you can model. Check the box when you model each and provide an example.

© Speechy Musings

## Here's some things that were modeled on the AAC system. We...

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Asked questions
Here's a question that was modeled: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Told jokes
Here's a joke that was modeled: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Asked for items or activities
Here's a request that was modeled: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Refused items or activities
Here's a refusal that was modeled: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Used greetings (like hello or goodbye)
Here's a greeting that was modeled: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Got the attention of adults or peers
Here's a way to gain attention that was modeled: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Shared feelings
Here's a feeling that was modeled: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Made comments
Here's a comment that was modeled: _____

## REFLECT:
**Which functions were easy to model? Which were more difficult?**

# FUNCTIONS CHALLENGE:

**GOAL:** Increase the use of a wide variety of different communication functions.

Identify the different communication functions that are used. Check the box when each type is used and provide an example.

**Below are examples of different communication functions. The AAC user...**

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Asked questions
Here's a question that was asked: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Told jokes
Here's a joke that was told: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Asked for items or activities
Here's a request that was made: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Refused items or activities
Here's a refusal that was made: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Used greetings (like hello or goodbye)
Here's a greeting that was used: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Got the attention of adults or peers
Here's an example of getting attention: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Shared feelings
Here's a feeling that was used: _____

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Made comments
Here's a comment that was made: _____

## REFLECT:
**Which functions were used most often? Which functions were used less?**

# Check out these...

# EXTRAS

## INCLUDES:

- AAC Weekly Data Sheet
- Core Vocab Boards
- How to Model Printable
- Staff Handouts
- AAC Research

# AAC WEEKLY DATA

### day one
Access:  0  1  2  3          Modeling:  0  1  2  3

Communication Opportunities:  0-50   50-100   100-150   150-200   200+

Top Vocabulary Words Targeted:

Check Functions Targeted:
☐ Requests    ☐ Refusal    ☐ Greetings    ☐ Comments    ☐ Gain Attention    ☐ Feelings

### day two
Access:  0  1  2  3          Modeling:  0  1  2  3

Communication Opportunities:  0-50   50-100   100-150   150-200   200+

Top Vocabulary Words Targeted:

Check Functions Targeted:
☐ Requests    ☐ Refusal    ☐ Greetings    ☐ Comments    ☐ Gain Attention    ☐ Feelings

### day three
Access:  0  1  2  3          Modeling:  0  1  2  3

Communication Opportunities:  0-50   50-100   100-150   150-200   200+

Top Vocabulary Words Targeted:

Check Functions Targeted:
☐ Requests    ☐ Refusal    ☐ Greetings    ☐ Comments    ☐ Gain Attention    ☐ Feelings

### day four
Access:  0  1  2  3          Modeling:  0  1  2  3

Communication Opportunities:  0-50   50-100   100-150   150-200   200+

Top Vocabulary Words Targeted:

Check Functions Targeted:
☐ Requests    ☐ Refusal    ☐ Greetings    ☐ Comments    ☐ Gain Attention    ☐ Feelings

### day five
Access:  0  1  2  3          Modeling:  0  1  2  3

Communication Opportunities:  0-50   50-100   100-150   150-200   200+

Top Vocabulary Words Targeted:

Check Functions Targeted:
☐ Requests    ☐ Refusal    ☐ Greetings    ☐ Comments    ☐ Gain Attention    ☐ Feelings

# CORE VOCABULARY BOARDS

On the following pages, I've included several versions of a core vocabulary board. These boards are a fantastic way to implement an AAC system ASAP (without waiting for costly tech) and to get your staff modeling! Please read this page thoroughly to learn more!

## CONTENTS:

1) **Core Vocabulary Boards**
   - 6 Symbols
   - 12 Symbols
   - 18 Symbols
   - 24 Symbols
   - 35 Symbols (full version)
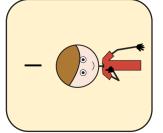
   (print onto the back of the core boards if desired)

2) **How to Model Using a Core Vocabulary Board Printable**
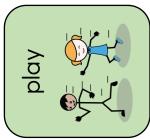
## HELPFUL INFORMATION:

- These core boards were made using researched vocabulary words that are from the top words used by toddlers and young children. (Banajee, 2003).
- In case you work with students who may get overwhelmed using the full board (35 symbols), I've included 5 different versions. As they grow, the symbol locations DO NOT MOVE. This is critical so AAC users can rely on motor memory skills and be able to easily recall where the symbols/words are (i.e., similar to how you and I might use a keyboard).
- I like to print these double-sided with the included directions on the back. They can also be printed on larger paper to make classroom posters. Or, you can print two copies, laminate, cut apart the second copy, and attach to the first using Velcro to make an interactive version. This is great for really bringing the attention to the symbol you're modeling.
- These boards are also fantastic for home carryover!
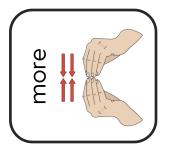
PLEASE NOTE: While core vocabulary boards are a research-based, effective method for introducing AAC and modeling on, they <u>do not</u> replace a robust, voice output device for many children. Please, always do a thorough AAC evaluation before implementation!
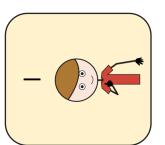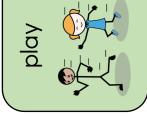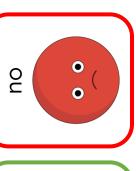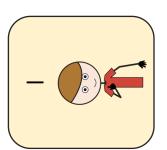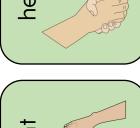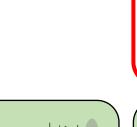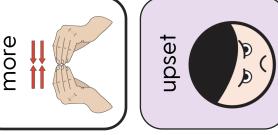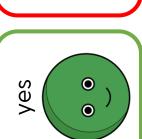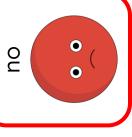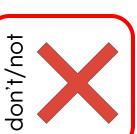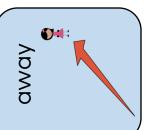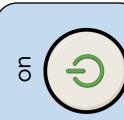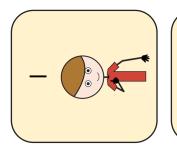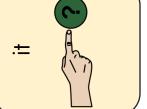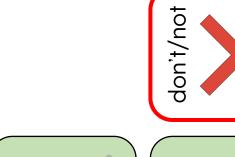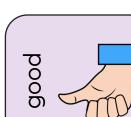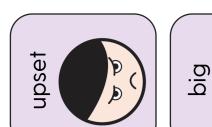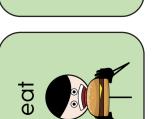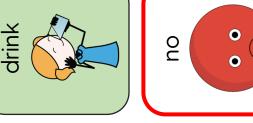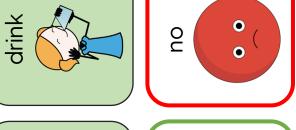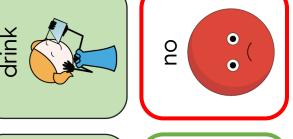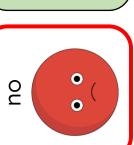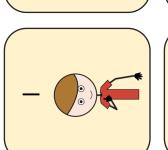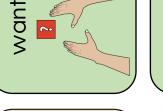
more

stop

want

play

go

I

more

what

help

don't/not

stop

want

play

go

no

I

you/your

yes

| | |
|---|---|
| more | upset |

| | |
|---|---|
| | on |
| again | what |
| | away |
| help | don't/not | stop |
| want | play | go | like/love |
| | | | no |
| I | you/your | eat | yes |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| more | upset | big |
| | good | on |
| again | what | away |
| help | don't/not | stop |
| want | play | go | like/love | turn |
| | my/mine | | drink | no |
| I | it | you/your | eat | yes |

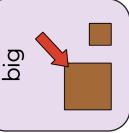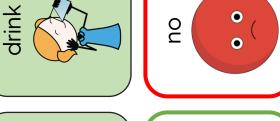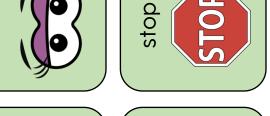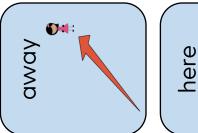| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| more | upset | big | out | time |
| different | good | all | on | later |
| again | what | where | away | here |
| help | do | don't/not | see/look | stop |
| want | play | go | like/love | turn |
| we | my/mine | they | drink | no |
| I | it | you/your | eat | yes |

# HOW TO MODEL USING A CORE VOCABULARY BOARD:
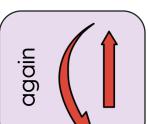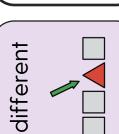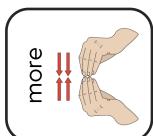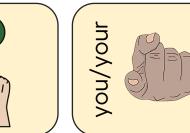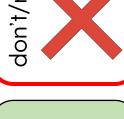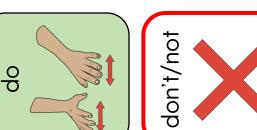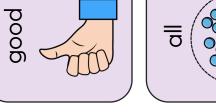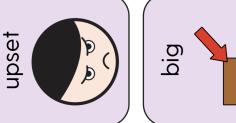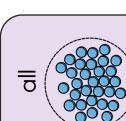
**1** **Point to the symbols** on the board while you talk.

**2** **Stick to the keywords.** For example, if you say "It is time to eat!", point to the symbols "It+time+eat" while you talk.

**3** **Make it fun and low pressure!** Modeling is all about exposure. Don't require the child to say anything.

## EXAMPLE PHRASES TO MODEL:

- I want _____.
- I love _____.
- Turn it on.
- What time (is) it?
- My turn.
- Go away!
- Time (to) go.
- Stop play(ing)!
- Yes, good! You (can) do it!

PLEASE KEEP THIS BOARD OUT AND MODEL ON IT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE! ☺

## IF THE CHILD... THEN MODEL...

| IF THE CHILD... | THEN MODEL... |
| --- | --- |
| Looks upset/sad/frustrated | Upset, stop, no, don't/not, go away |
| Looks happy/excited | Good, I love, more, again, yes |
| Is playing a game | My/your turn, good, play, help, look |
| Is transitioning | Time, go, out, different, where, away |
| Needs help/looks confused | What, where, want, I, help, you |

Please check off the units as you complete them. Sign the bottom and return when you are finished. Thank you!

☐ **AAC Basics**
Get familiar with AAC and what it is.

☐ **Access**
Make sure the system is out at all times.

☐ **Modeling**
Consistently model using the system.

☐ **Core Vocabulary**
Focus on core vocabulary and keywords.

☐ **Communication Opportunities**
Plan opportunities for communication throughout the day.

I have read through the included information and understand my role in implementing the AAC system.

Signature: _____

Hello!

This packet includes information on AAC to better help you work with AAC users. **Please read all of the pages closely.**

Let me know if you have any questions or concerns about effectively using the AAC system.  It may feel intimidating and unfamiliar at first, but the more you use it and follow the instructions in this packet, the more comfortable you'll get.

Thanks so much for your commitment to learning! Our AAC users appreciate it!

-

# AAC RESEARCH:

**Want to read some research that supports the techniques taught in this packet? Check out the studies below.**

### On the increase in speech production after being given access to AAC:
Millar, D. C., Light, J. C., & Schlosser, R. W. (2006). The impact of augmentative and alternative communication intervention on the speech production of individuals with developmental disabilities: A research review. Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 49, 248-264.

Schlosser, R., & Wendt, O. (2008). Effects of augmentative and alternative communication intervention on speech production in children with autism: A systematic review. American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 17(3), 212–230.

### On keeping symbols in consistent locations:
Thistle, J. J., Holmes, S. A., Horn, M. M., & Reum, A. M. (2018). Consistent Symbol Location Affects Motor Learning in Preschoolers Without Disabilities: Implications for Designing Augmentative and Alternative Communication Displays. *Am J Speech Lang Pathol*, 27(3), 1010-1017. doi: 10.1044/2018_AJSLP-17-0129.

### On the effectiveness of AAC modeling:
O'Neill, T., Light, J., & Pope, L. (2018). Effects of Interventions That Include Aided Augmentative and Alternative Communication Input on the Communication of Individuals With Complex Communication Needs: A Meta-Analysis. *J Speech Lang Hear Res*, 61(7), 1743-1765. doi: 10.1044/2018_JSLHR-L-17-0132.

### On using and teaching core vocabulary:
van Tilborg, A. & Deckers, S. R. J. M. (2016). Vocabulary Selection in AAC: Application of Core Vocabulary in Atypical Populations. *Perspect ASHA SIGs*, 1 (SIG 12), 125–138. doi: 10.1044/persp1.SIG12.125

### On using a least to most prompting strategy:
Finke, E. H., Davis, J. M., Benedict, M., Goga, L., Kelly, J., Palumbo, L., ... Waters, S. (2017). Effects of a Least-to-Most Prompting Procedure on Multisymbol Message Production in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder Who Use Augmentative and Alternative Communication. *Am J Speech Lang Pathol*, 26(1), 81-98. doi: 10.1044/2016_AJSLP-14-0187.

### On using math/science to teach vocabulary and language (descriptive teaching):
Boruta, M. C. & Bidstrup, K. (2012). Making It A Reality: Using Standards-Based General Education Science and Math Curriculum To Teach Vocabulary and Language Structures to Students Who Use AAC. *Perspect Augment Altern Commun*, 21(3), 99-104.

**On the most frequent words used by toddlers and recommended core vocabulary:**
Banajee, M., Dicarlo, C., Stricklin, S. (2003). Core vocabulary determination for toddlers. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, *19*, 67-73.

Brown, R. (1973). A First Language: The Early Stages. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

**On the most frequent words used by preschool and elementary aged students:**
Clendon, S. A., & Erickson, K. A. (2008). The vocabulary of beginning writers: Implications for children with complex communication needs. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, *24*, 281-293.

Marvin, C., Beukelman, D. & Bilyeu, D (1994). Frequently Occurring Home and School Words from Vocabulary-Use Patterns in Preschool Children: Effects of Context and Time Sampling, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 10.

**On the most frequent words used by adult AAC users:**
Beukelman, D., Yorkston, K. & Naranjo, C. (1984). 500 most Frequently Occurring Words Produced by Five Adult AAC Users, Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders, 49, 36.

**On training paraeducators and support staff in AAC:**
Binger, C., Kent-Walsh, J., Ewing, C., & Taylor, S. (2010). Teaching Educational Assistants to Facilitate the Multisymbol Message Productions of Young Students Who Require Augmentative and Alternative Communication. *Am J Speech Lang Pathol*, 19(2), 108-120.

Douglas, S. (2012). Teaching Paraeducators to Support the Communication of Individuals Who Use Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A Literature Review. *Current Issues in Education*, *15*(1).

Kent - Walsh, J. (2008). Communication Partner Interventions for Students who use AAC . Perspectives on Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 17, 1, 27 - 32.

**On the importance of getting 200 communication opportunities a day (and how!):**
Baker, K., Carrillo, D., & Stanton, F. (2011). 200 A Day the Easy Way: Putting It Into Practice. *Perspect Augment Altern Commun*, 20(4), 125-133.

**Teaching vocabulary through shared book reading to students using AAC:**
Yorke, A. M., Light, J. C., Gosnell Caron, J., McNaughton, D. B., & Drager, K. D. R. (2018). The effects of explicit instruction in academic vocabulary during shared book reading on the receptive vocabulary of children with complex communication needs.

# Thank You!

## YOUR SUPPORT MEANS MORE TO ME THAN YOU COULD EVER KNOW

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## Thanks for shopping, see you soon!

Stay Amazing,

*Shannon*

I believe that when we do better, our students do better