

1

AAC BASICS

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WHAT IS AAC:

AAC is short for augmentative and alternative communication.

Augmentative means "to supplement" so it includes things that make communication easier such as text messaging or pointing. Alternative 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.

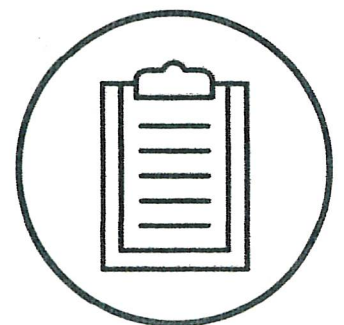
- 1 – No Tech: Doesn't require extra equipment (e.g., pointing, gestures, facial expressions, body language, or sign language).
- 2 – Low Tech: Doesn't require a battery (e.g., picture symbol books, writing, alphabet boards).
- 3 – High Tech: Systems using technology (e.g., iPads, dedicated systems).

Communication is a fundamental human right. AAC is a powerful, meaningful tool!

AND DID YOU KNOW...

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

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



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.

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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.

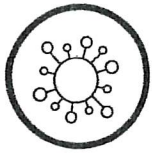


BEST PRACTICE #2: MODELING

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 core vocabulary.



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 communication opportunities.

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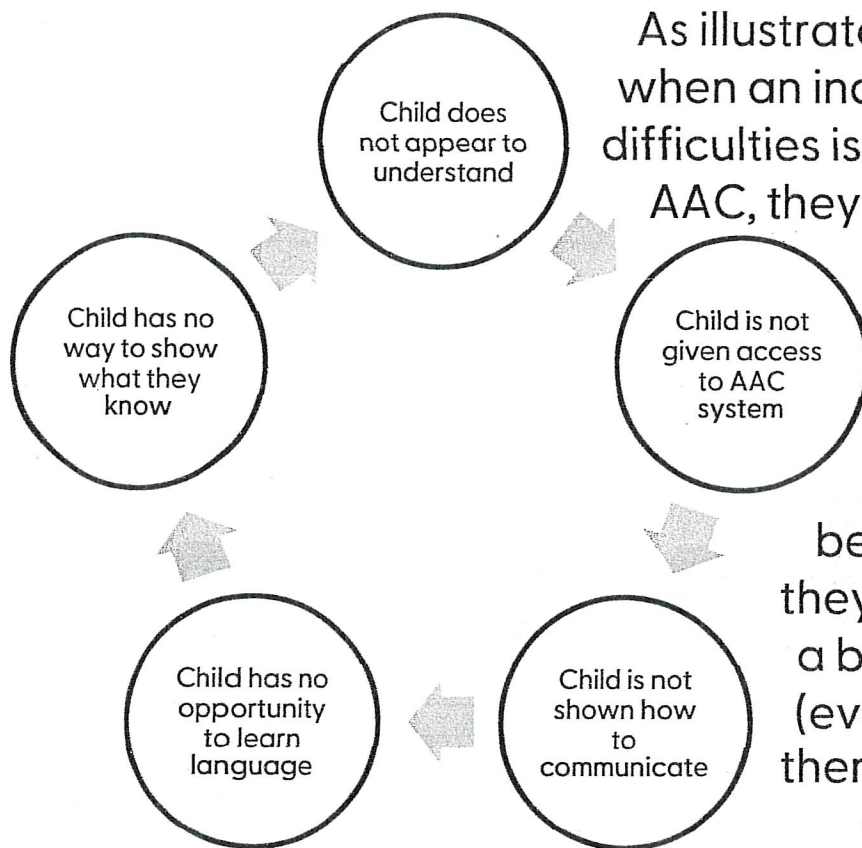
Stick with these four best practices, and with time, you’ll develop confidence in your skills and become a more effective communication partner for AAC users. Seeing progress with AAC can take a lot of time and patience but remind yourself that it takes a full year of exposure before babies start talking 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!

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING ACCESS



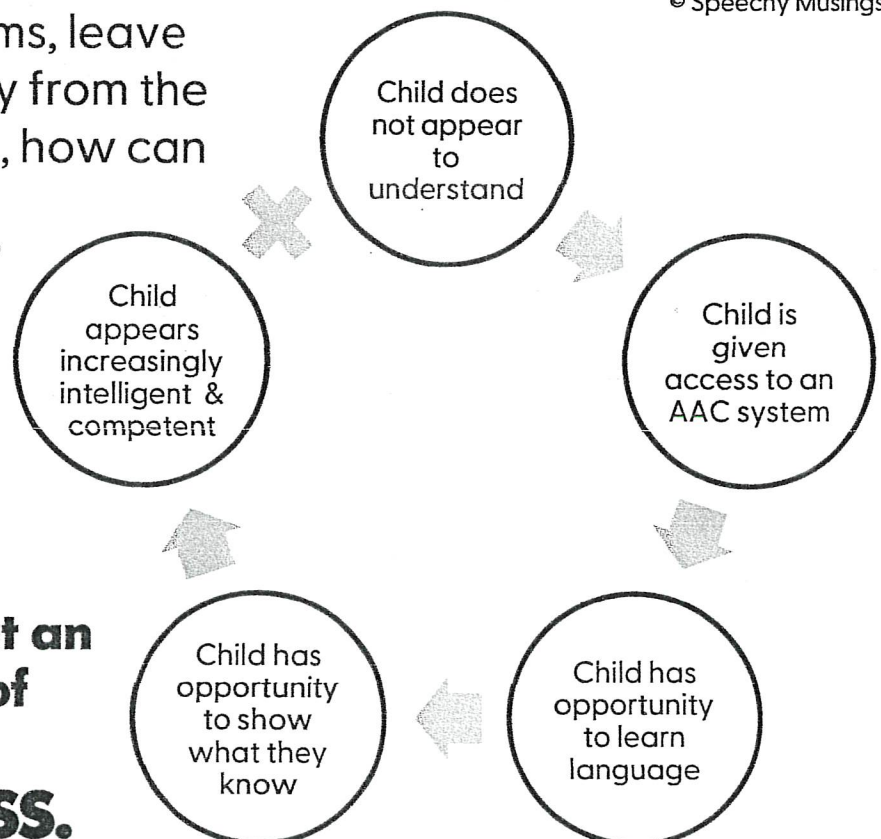
As illustrated in the graphic on the left, when an individual with communication difficulties isn't given access to consistent AAC, they aren't able to learn how to use language. They are often thought of as less intelligent. Many times, individuals aren't provided with access to AAC because they haven't 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.

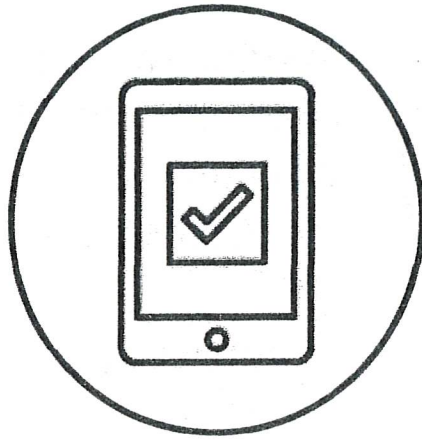
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If we abandon AAC systems, leave them in backpacks or away from the individual who needs them, how can we expect them to become competent communicators?

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.





This device is

MY VOICE

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

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 at all times.

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

1

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”)?

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.

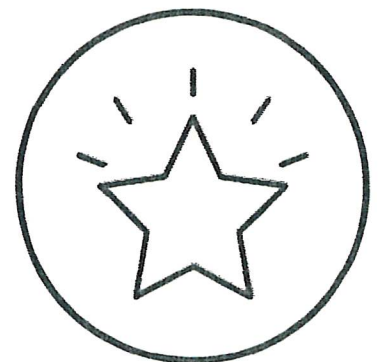
TAKE ACTION:

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.

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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.

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- **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.

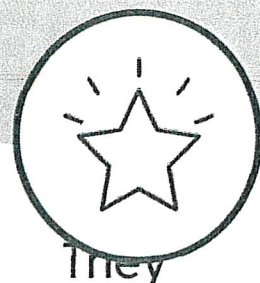
- **What should I do if the AAC user doesn't watch me model or seem interested?**

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 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



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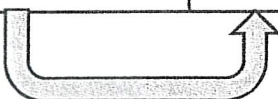
When working with AAC users and modeling, it can be helpful to think about the Plus One Technique. This involves taking whatever language the AAC user produces (either verbally or on the device) and expanding on it by one word.

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.

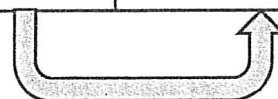
If the AAC user can request “more”, try modeling “want + more”. Once they learn and use “want + more”, expand your modeling to something like “want + more + please”.

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



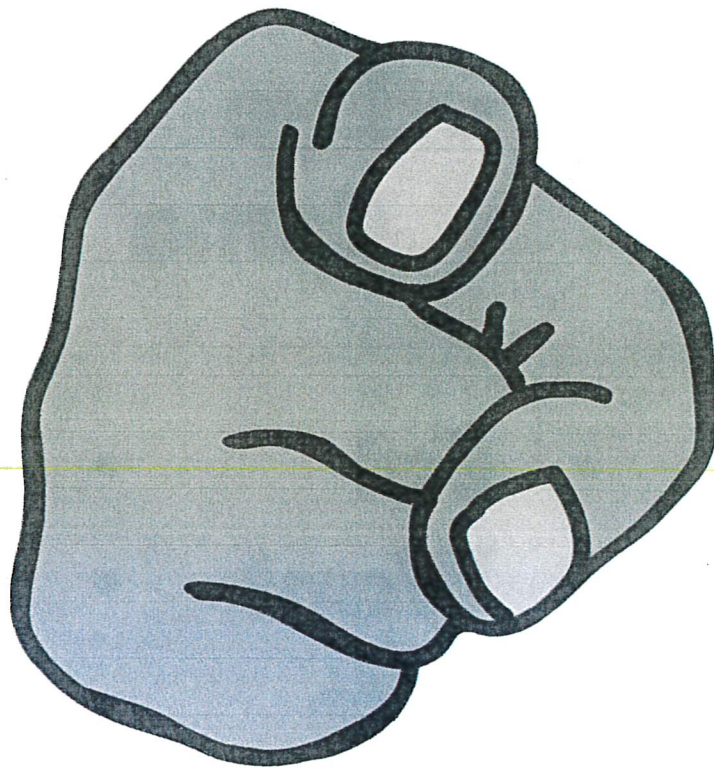
If they use one word, model two.



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!

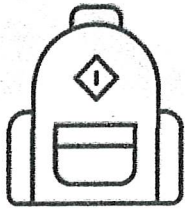
I WANT YOU



to be

MODELING ON THE AAC SYSTEM

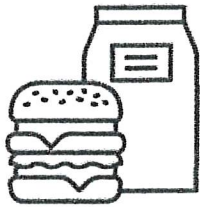
WORDS YOU CAN **MODEL and TEACH**



DURING TRANSITIONS

or when moving between
rooms or activities.

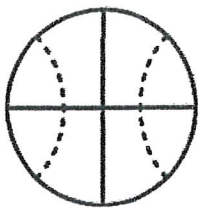
- **Go**
- **Hi**
- **Bye**
- **Come**
- **Done**
- **Where**
- **Look**
- **Put**



WHILE EATING

snack or lunch

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



WHEN PLAYING

a game, out at recess,
or with a friend.

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

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

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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.

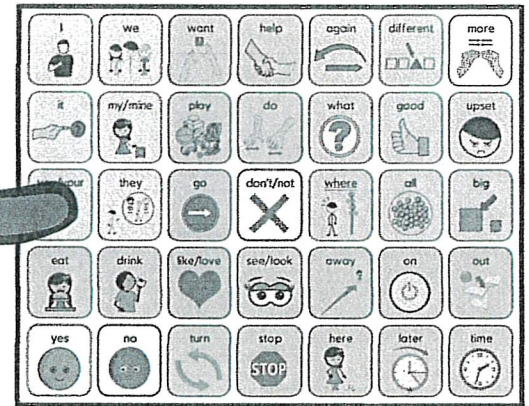
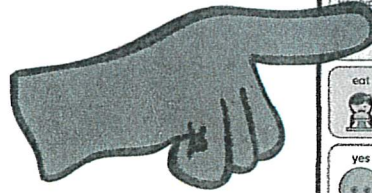
5

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.

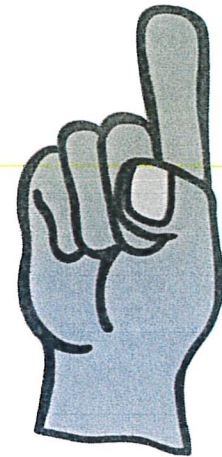
MODEL

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.



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.

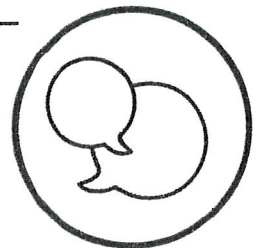
MAY

Put It All Together

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

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?



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

WHILE WATCHING VIDEOS

1	Pick out and introduce video.	
	<u>WHAT TO DO:</u> • 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).	<u>WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:</u> • “<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/funny/scary</u>!” • “<u>Turn</u> it <u>on</u>.”
2	Watch the video.	
	<u>WHAT TO DO:</u> • Watch the video. Describe what happens throughout. • Pause the video. Describe the scene. • Make predictions.	<u>EXAMPLE PHRASES TO MODEL:</u> • “Look at the _____.” • “He/she is _____.” • “I think they will _____.” • “This is _____.”
3	Rate the video and discuss.	
	<u>WHAT TO DO:</u> • Talk about whether you liked the video or not. • Describe what happened in the video using core vocabulary. • Retell your favorite parts.	<u>WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:</u> • <u>Like/not like</u> • <u>Funny/silly/boring/scary/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

DURING TRANSITIONS

Prepare and foreshadow.

1

WHAT TO DO:

- Refer to their schedule (if used).
 - Foreshadow when the transition will happen.
- Pause after you model so they can answer/respond.

WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:

- "It's time for _____."
- "We're going to walk to math."
 - "Let's go."
- "First clean up, then go to math".

Transition.

2

WHAT TO DO:

- Give specific and clear directions.
- Describe what you're doing.
- Give them a job (greeting peers, introducing the activity).

TRANSITION VOCABULARY:

- First
- Then
- Go
- Stop
- Different
- Time
- Now
- Help
- Walk
- Feel _____

Reinforce and provide feedback.

3

WHAT TO DO:

- Repeat directions and help them get settled.
 - Provide feedback.
- Refer to their schedule again to remind them of what is next.

WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:

- "You did good!"
- "Thanks for walking quietly."
 - "Now it's time to sit."
- "Look 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?).

creating communication opportunities DURING BOOK READING

1	Introduce the book.	
	<u>WHAT TO DO:</u> • Get their attention. Point to and talk about the cover. • Refer to their schedule (if used). • Give them as much control as possible.	<u>WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:</u> • “<u>Look!</u>” • “We’re going to <u>read</u> a <u>book!</u>” • “It looks <u>fun/silly/scary!</u>” • “Let’s <u>open</u> the <u>book!</u>”
2	Read the book.	
	<u>WHAT TO DO:</u> • Read the text or just make up your own silly version. • Point to and describe the pictures & actions in the book.	<u>WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:</u> • Model book reading vocabulary such as “<u>turn</u> the page” or “<u>read</u> it”. • Model keywords from the text in the book as you read.
	EXAMPLES: “Wow! That’s a <u>big</u> dragon!” “ <u>He</u> <u>wants</u> to <u>go</u> home.”	
3	Reflect on and rate the book.	
	<u>WHAT TO DO:</u> • Talk about whether you liked the book or not. • Describe what happened in the book using core vocabulary. • Retell your favorite parts.	<u>WHAT TO SAY & MODEL:</u> • <u>Like/not like</u> • <u>Fun/silly/boring/scary</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