

BUILDING BRIDGES TO COMMUNICATION: THE VITAL ROLE OF EARLY AAC INTERVENTION

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FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES

- Relevant Financial Relationships: Dr. Brown is an AAC Specialist & SLP with Dynamic Therapy Associates, Associate Professor & Assistant Practicum Coordinator with Brescia University, and Adjunct Professor with Western Kentucky University
- Relevant Non-financial Relationships: Dr. Brown has no relevant non-financial relationships to disclose

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

01

Identify indicators for AAC implementation

02

Identify various ways to introduce AAC to children under 8 years old

03

Increase parent/teacher involvement engagement during sessions and carryover at home or in the classroom

INTRODUCTION TO AAC

Low-tech AAC

- Gestures
- Pictures
- Switches
- Sign
- Pointing
- Facial Expressions
- Writing/Alphabet boards
- PODD

High-tech AAC

- Speech-Generating Devices
- Eye Gaze Devices



**EARLY
COMMUNICATION
MILESTONES 13-18
MONTHS**

- Looks around when asked “where” questions
- Follows simple commands
- Points to complete early pragmatic functions (requests, comment, etc.)
- Responds to yes/no questions with head nod/shake
- Imitation
- Understands and uses words for common objects, actions, and familiar people
- Identifies early body parts
- Uses early gestures such as clapping hands, high-fives, making funny faces
- Uses a combination of long strings with appropriate speech-like inflection
- Actively acquiring new words

[ASHA.org/public/developmental-milestones](https://asha.org/public/developmental-milestones)



**EARLY
COMMUNICATION
MILESTONES 19-24
MONTHS**

- Uses and understands at least 50 words for various items
- Articulation may not always be clear and will likely hear various age-appropriate errors
- Puts two or more words together into simple phrases
- Makes animal sounds
- Follows two-step directions
- Uses early possessive pronouns
- Asks for help
- Uses 1-2 word questions

[ASHA.org/public/developmental-milestones](https://www.asha.org/public/developmental-milestones)

**EARLY
COMMUNICATION
MILESTONES 2-3
YEARS**

- Various word combinations with some repetitions
- Seeks attention with the use of words
- Expressively knows their name and age (either verbally or gestures)
- Uses plurals
- Uses –ing verbs and adds –ed to end of words
- Can give logical reasons for things and events
- Asks why and how
- Uses negatives
- Answers early open-ended questions
- Correctly produces early phonemes (p, b, m, h, w, d, t, k, g, and n) and most vowels
- Speech is becoming more clear (50% to unfamiliar listeners at age 2 (75% to familiar), 75% to unfamiliar listeners at age 3 (100% to familiar))
- Knows descriptive words and starts to use them
- Understands some spatial concepts

**EARLY
COMMUNICATION
MILESTONES 3-4
YEARS**

- Compares things, using various descriptors
- Tells a story from book or video
- Understands and uses more prepositions/spatial concepts
- Understands and uses articles in phrases and sentences
- Pretends to read
- Recognizes signs and logos
- Pretends to write or spell and can write some letters
- Correctly produces (t, k, g, f, y, and -ing), says all syllables, produces initial, medial and final consonants
- By age 4, child should be 100% intelligible to both familiar and unfamiliar listeners
- Producing consonant clusters
- Categorizing
- Identifies colors
- Able to describe object functions
- Regularly answers wh- questions
- Uses 4+ word sentences



**EARLY
COMMUNICATION
MILESTONES 4-5
YEARS**

- Produce grammatically correct sentences, which are longer and more complex
- Include various parts of a story (main character, plot, settings, etc.)
- Begins to use irregular plurals
- Understands and uses location words
- Uses temporal words
- Follows simple directions and rules to play games
- Locates the front of a book and its title
- Recognizes and names 10 or more letters and can usually write their name
- Imitates reading and writing from left to right
- Blends word parts, begins identifying rhyming words
- Answers "why" questions
- Categorical naming
- Can answer questions about a short story read aloud

WHEN TO BE CONCERNED WITH SPEECH & LANGUAGE

Anytime your child is not meeting the age-appropriate milestones

If your child is unable to effectively communicate their basic wants and needs

The emergence of negative behaviors due to frustrations from lack of communication

Difficulty in areas other than just expressive communication (receptive, pragmatics, fluency, etc.)

As a parent, educator, or therapist, if you are concerned, follow your instinct and start the referral process

EARLY INTERVENTION MODELS

- Coaching
- Family-Centered Practice
- Expansion
- Modeling
- Focused Stimulation
- Parallel Talk
- Prelinguistic Milieu Teaching
- Recasting
- AAC
- And many many more



WHEN DO I INTRODUCE AAC? HOW?



As soon as you identify the need

There is no “checklist” or hard and fast rules on the introduction of AAC

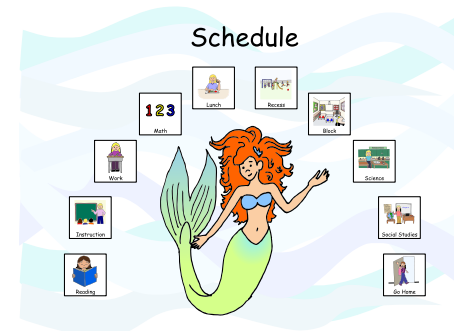
AAC does NOT mean we’re giving up on spoken words

Young children

- Use visual schedule for each session
- Multiple short activities for a session with visuals to represent start and finished
- Use items that will facilitate the use of a variety of core words
- Include the family
- Introduce robust AAC system

School-age children

- Visual schedules
- First-Then boards
- Core word boards
- Robust AAC systems
- Include teachers and family



Schedule

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FIRST

Doctor visit



THEN

Playground



ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION

ASSESSMENT

- AAC Genie
- Communication Matrix
- DAAG-3
- Functional Communication Profile
- MOSAIC
- FIATS-AAC

SELECTION

- Low-tech vs. High-tech
- Using assessment results to guide choice in AAC model
- Motor planning (Operational based navigation)
- Linguistic-Based Navigation
- Activity Based Navigation
- Pragmatic Based Navigation

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES



INTERVENTION MODELS



MODELING

Modeling can include (a) the communication partner (parent, therapist, etc.) models the use of aided AAC in interactions without requiring any communication from the user, (b) modeling as prompts to elicit a specific communication behavior from the potential user, and (c) modeling as instruction in instructional demonstration targeting the potential user (Wandin, 2023)



Can be used to not only target communication, but also pre-academic/academic skills, play, social skills, and joint attention



Rarely used independently, but rather in conjunction with other interventions including:

Expansions & recasts

Prompts & cues

Using motivating/reinforcing
objects or activities

Expectant pauses

MODEL WITHOUT EXPECTATION

FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

Can include the use of aided or unaided communication (low-tech and/or high-tech)



Aims to reduce challenging or negative behaviors and empower the individuals to communicate



Important to accept any/all forms of communication as a communication attempt from the individual

COMPLIANCE DOES NOT EQUAL ENGAGEMENT

Engagement in a session and with their communication partner is vital to the success of any communication attempt from a child

NATURALISTIC INSTRUCTION

Contexts include a child's routines, activities, and social interactions that occur regularly, throughout their day, and across their settings (home, school, and community)

Great opportunity to use & teach core word vocabulary

Target within a home environment based on the parents' goals and wants/needs for the child within the home

Target within the school environment using a push-in model and implement the use of AAC throughout their lesson/activity in the classroom

Natural context, child-led (mainly) with incidentally created opportunities for supported communication, and incorporate the use of other language intervention strategies

**CHILD-LED
THERAPY LEADS
TO:**



INCREASED
ENGAGEMENT



AUTHENTIC
RELATIONSHIPS



CONNECTIONS



FOSTERING
INTRINSIC
MOTIVATION



AAAAAND...IT'S
FUN

MULTI-MODAL COMMUNICATION

All-encompassing
or all-inclusive

Various modes of
communication
are accepted and
can be used to
communicate
with others

Crucial to building
confidence in a
child with speech
and language
difficulties

Signs, Visuals,
Pictures, SGDs,
and more

ALL FORMS OF COMMUNICATION ARE
COMMUNICATION, AND AS
COMMUNICATION PARTNERS, WE NEED TO
HONOR ALL COMMUNICATION ATTEMPTS



PARENT/TEACHER EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT

Coaching

Incorporate into the session

Implementation plans

Functional & accessible



ACTIVITIES

Core Vocabulary

- Targeting “look” and “see” with a board book
- Targeting “like” and “not” for various foods/sensory items/toys/music
- Targeting “more” and “finished” with various activities

Social

- Targeting feelings with identifying facial expressions
- Having a play and acting out different emotions
- Social hour

Academic

- Calendar time
- Math
- Literacy
- Concepts

**WHAT IF MY
CHILD/STUDENT IS
A GESTALT
LANGUAGE
PROCESSOR??**

We'll save that for another day, BUT these are a few of my favorites with great knowledge and resources in this area!

- Meaningful Speech
- Connections Speech Pathology
- Emily Diaz





QUESTIONS??

REFERENCES

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