

Reverse the Curse: Device Abandonment & Prompt-Dependency in AAC



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Non Financial Disclosure

- Ann is a member of ASHA and helps facilitate a statewide AT/AAC Community of Practice.



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At the end of the session, attendees will be able to:

1. Identify and describe modeling vs. prompting/placing demands in at least 1 video
2. Identify and describe prompt-dependency from at least 1 video
3. Identify and describe device abandonment in at least 1 video

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What does Device Abandonment look like?

- **Rejecting their talker**
- **Protesting when it's modeled**
- **Refusing to carry the talker**
- **Protesting when it's brought out**
- **Hiding their talker**



Video of Device Abandonment



Strategy to REVERSE THE CURSE

Add highly preferred AND visually familiar vocabulary (Personal Core)

- People
- Characters
- Pets
- Foods
- Toys
- Sensory objects
- Places
- Books



Model these while the learner is doing a hands-on activity like eating or coloring, so they don't feel pressured to imitate your modeling

What is “Modeling”?

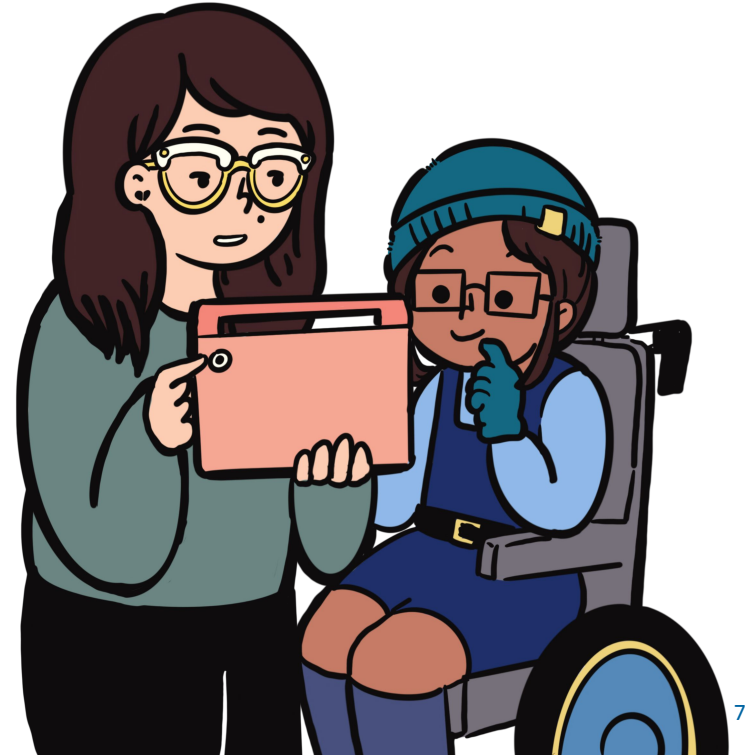
Research-based teaching strategy referred to as:

1. Aided Language Input (ALI)
2. Aided Language Stimulation (ALS)
3. Partner-Augmented Input (PAI)

*Don't just search “**Modeling**” on YouTube*

Modeling is demonstrating, NOT giving a direction.

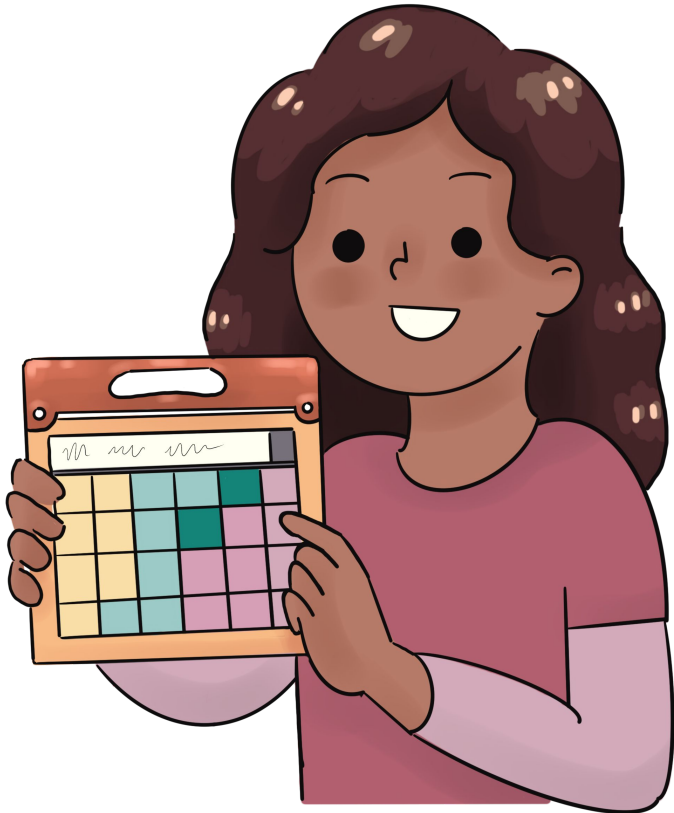
Show the learner how to use the talker, so they can imitate IF they want to.



Video of Modeling (w/ Spontaneous Verbal Imitation)



Yes, YOU use the Talker MORE than the learner!



- The only way the learner can imitate **appropriate** use of the talker is to see someone else use it **appropriately**
- If you were learning a second language, you would expect your teacher to speak it more than you
- Model **without expecting imitation** (forcing imitation is **prompting**, *even if it's just a pause and an expectant look*)

- When an individual is provided with modeling, they are sometimes **forced** to imitate.

Forcing imitation is considered prompting!

- An individual who is prompted to imitate models can easily become **prompt-dependent**.

3 signs your AAC learner already is or is becoming prompt-dependent:

1. Doesn't initiate/ little spontaneous use of their talker
2. If you remove prompts, they will wait for one
3. After waiting, they will interpret any sound or movement from the adult as a **prompt** (*I once waited out a young man for close to 5 minutes, but then I sneezed!*)

Video of Prompt-Dependency



Strategy to REVERSE THE CURSE

Only use “Third-Party” prompting

The Prompter is
outside
the conversation



Communication Partner
just waits or asks ? again

- This makes it more natural to “fade” prompting
- Prompter uses a SILENT Least to Most Hierarchy of Prompting

What is a SILENT Least to Most Hierarchy?



1. **Wait** and expect communication (Often forgotten in the moment)

2. **General gesture cue** (Gesture in general towards the AAC tool, such as point to it or push it closer to the student, like a reminder their AAC tool exists.)

3. **More specific gesture cue** (Point to the appropriate button/device activation point/PECS card, even a moving point to get their attention better, like you're going to do it, but you don't.)

NOTE: No verbal prompts should be used (although they are least intrusive, they are the hardest to fade) 13

SILENT Least to Most Hierarchy Continued



4. **Partial physical prompt** by moving the student's arm towards the target. Push their elbow, so their hand hovers over the target.

5. If they stay hovering, **tap the back of their hand**.

6. Lastly use a **full physical prompt/hand-over-hand/hand-under-hand** to activate the target/pick up the PECS card. (Never jump to this. We are not teaching in an errorless manner like most DTI. Error correction is a skill that needs to be learned as well, like navigating back and/or deleting the last word.)

NOTE: No verbal prompts should be used (although they are least intrusive, they are the hardest to fade)

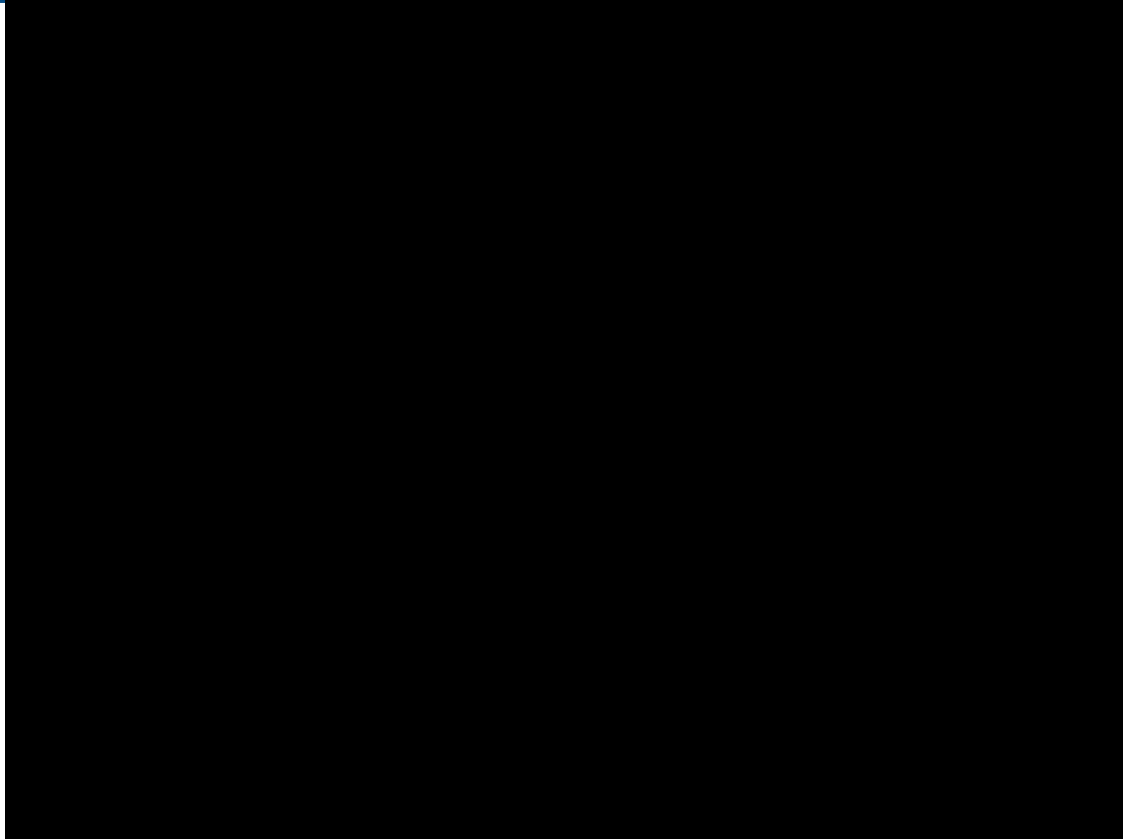
Step #1. Wait and Expect Communication



Step #2. General Gesture (Pointing to the talker)



Step #2. General Gesture (Moving the talker closer)

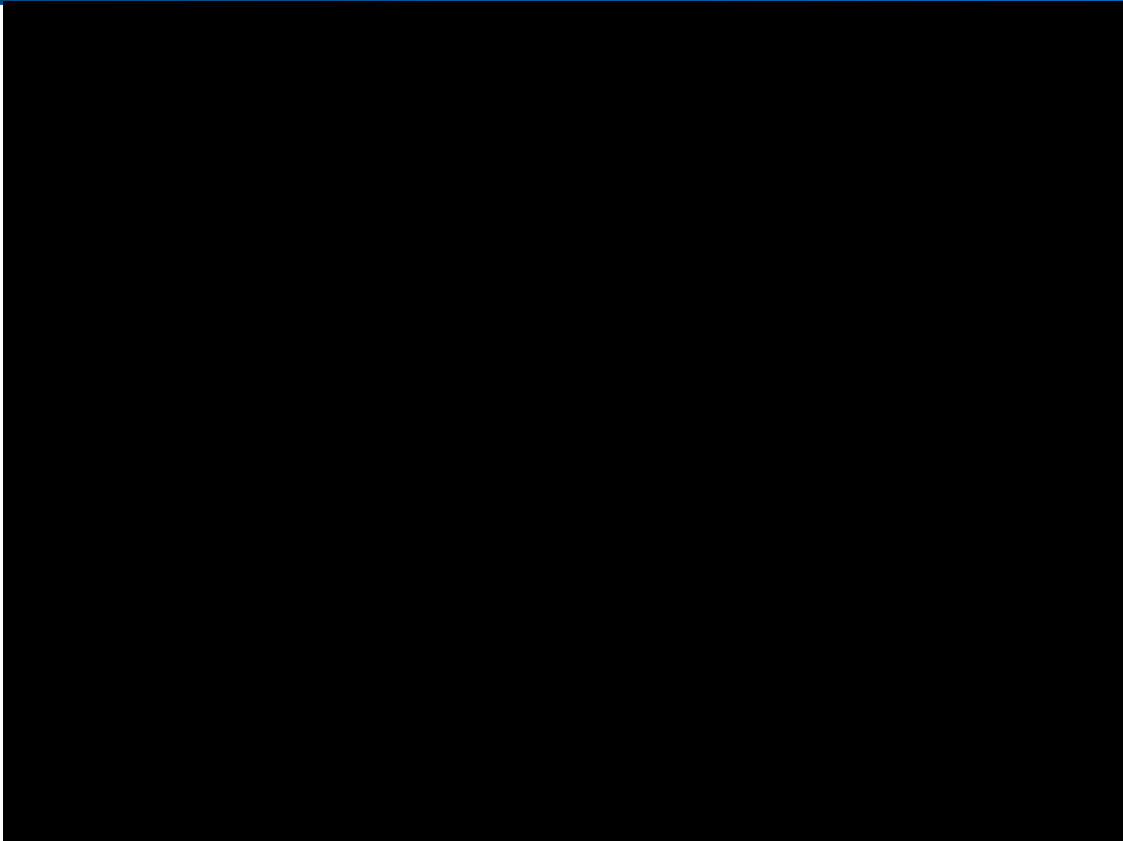


Step #3. More Specific Gesture



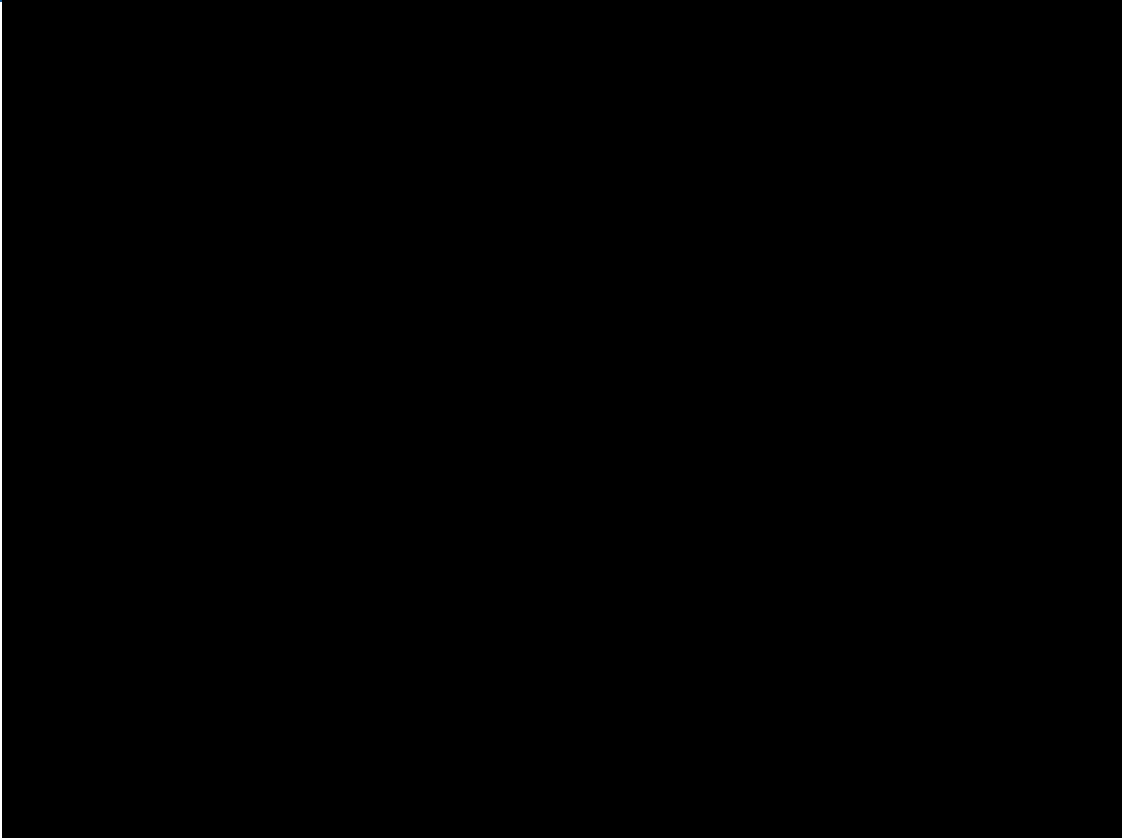


Step #4. Partial Physical Prompt





Step #6. Full Hand-Over-Hand Prompt



- When we model/demonstrate use of the talker, it's natural to expect the learner to show us they learned something by imitating our model.

BUT remember: Forcing imitation is prompting!

- An individual who learns the routine of being prompted, can easily become **prompt-dependent**, waiting for the prompt and therefore never initiating spontaneously.

- An individual who seeks to escape demands, which prompts are, can easily reject their talker, also known as **device abandonment**.



Model what you interpret the learner is trying to say

- Language should be from the learner's perspective
- Could occur as often as the learner is trying to say something that you **DO** understand.

Do not try to read the learner's mind if you're unsure, just model your own thoughts instead!

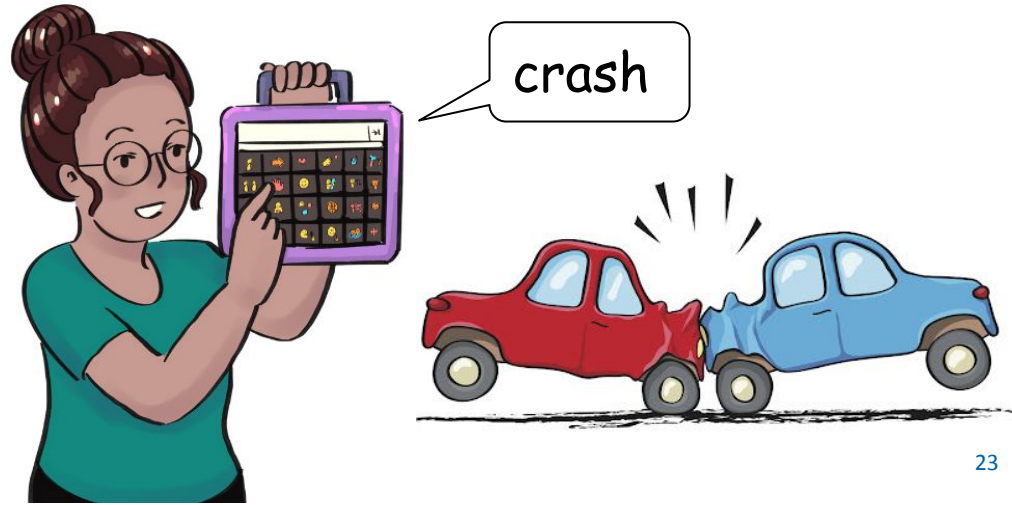


How do I Model My Own Thoughts?

Highlight keywords/phrases from what you say verbally to the learner

- Many people do this with ASL signs, so just do the same with the talker
- Could occur throughout the day regardless of understanding the learner

Modeling fun, silly words will *entice* the learner to pay attention and even spontaneously imitate!



Video of Modeling My Own Thoughts



When you model what peers say, they naturally become interested

- Talkers aren't just for talking to adults, model how to initiate an interaction with a peer



This is a great way to promote “peer modeling.” When the peer becomes interested in the talker, show them how they can use it too. Learners are more likely to imitate their peers than adults.

Speaking of Peers...

One of the students I consult on was retained in Kindergarten this year. He has had a talker since he was 4 because he has Childhood Apraxia of Speech, but this year his talker wasn't showing up at school every day. When I contacted his mom, she said they pack it in his backpack each morning, but were starting to find it **hidden** in random places around the house. When I met with the 6 year-old, he expressed he **didn't need it anymore**, but when I offered to loan a second talker from our AT Library that his whole class could use, he said **YES!** He had a new peer group because of the grade retention and he was anxious about looking different to the new peers. The classroom talker was used by his peers and **they all enjoyed it**. His talker started coming to school consistently again!



Loan **additional talkers** from your regional AT Lending Library or other agency

Print & laminate pages from the talker for **low-tech AAC use by peers**

Read books to peers about individuals who use talkers

- *Lucas the Lion Loves the Tiny Talker* by Ryan Rollen
- *Something to Say About My Communication Device* by Eden Molineux
- *AAC Rhyme Time* by Amanda Hartmann

Include pictures and videos of individuals using talkers in **all instructional materials**

- Instagram [@drawntoaac](#) (even can commission to create custom drawings!)

