AAC Practitioner Practices that Make Champion Communicators

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Disclosures

- Relevant Financial Relationship
  - Employee of Westside Children's Therapy and Midwestern University

- Non Relevant financial disclosure
  - Collaborate with a variety of technology companies to support client needs (i.e., Ablenet, PRC, TalktomeTechnologies, Smartbox, FORBES).

AAC Embrace

What *is* the practitioner practice that makes champion communicators?

- Modeling the *relationship* with client's AAC device to all communication partners

By definition, A *relationship* is the way two or more people:

1. Are connected
2. Behave toward each other

Questions to ask yourself:

- What *relationship* do you want your client to have with his/her/their AAC device?
- How can you teach him/her/them and their team that?

(M.W., 1995)

Relationships and AAC

Healthy	Unhealthy
Mutual respect *Trust* *Honesty* *Compromise* *Individuality* *Good communication* *Anger control* *Fighting fair* *Problem solving* *Understanding* *Self-confidence* *Being a role model*	*Control* *Hostility* *Dishonesty* *Disrespect* *Dependence* *Intimidation* *Physical violence* (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2005)

Listen

Engage

Acknowledge

Rapport
(building)

Nurture

(M. W., 2023)

Learner Outcomes: Steps to building healthy AAC Relationships

Everything that I share today are things that you can do in therapy today!

Today's teachings assume that the child coming to therapy with a speech-generating device that is feature-matched appropriately and the family is seeking your services:

Your first steps as a practitioner can be:
1. Name the device
2. Vocabulary voicing and skin tone collaboration
3. Vocabulary additions
4. Identification of Client's language level
5. Identification of Family's social-emotional state
6. Validation
7. Teaching trajectory

1. Name the device

"Naming things is a part of general human communication using words and language. It is an aspect of everyday taxonomy as people distinguish the objects of their experience, together with their similarities and differences, which observers identify, name and classify."

That means:
- The act of naming cements psychological ownership-the feeling that something is yours
- It indicates affection
- Triggers further bonding with that object

We want AAC users to develop a healthy and special relationship with their SGD and bond with it to maintain healthy relationships across settings. That means, the name stays the same across disciplines.

Name options:

- Talker
- Words
- Voice
- Device
- Computer

(Bateson, 2017)

2. Vocabulary voicing and skin tone collaboration

Voicing

- Your voice serves as a guide for what you say and how you say it
- Show families the options for voicing

Skin tone

- Representation matters
- Show families the options for the skin color on symbol-supported softwares

By having these conversations, you are building healthy connection to the family, client, and the device.
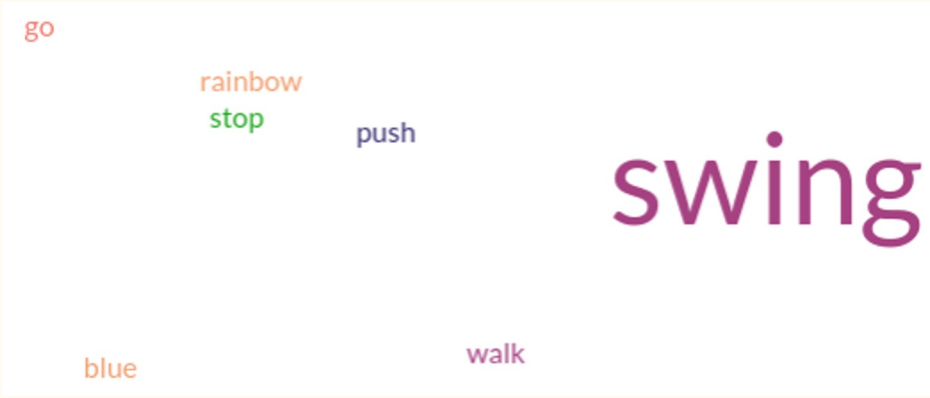
(Bradley, 2022)

3a. Vocabulary Additions

Operational framework:
- Build with client, family, and team by asking what does your child like to do? Then build.

Swing			
Communication Partner	Can-do	Needs-to-do	Wants-to-do
Parent	Look, point, run to swing	Ask for swing, wait to walk to swing	Swing
OT	Look, point, run to swing	Ask for different types of swings	Swing
BCBA	Look, point, run to swing	Ask for swing, travel with talker	Swing

(Sohlberg & Mateer, 2010)

3b. Vocabulary Additions

SLP/Team Language Collaboration	SLP/Team Language Collaboration

3c. Vocabulary Additions

When we use the operational framework across teams we build trust because we are making therapy personally relevant across disciplines with vocabulary that will impact the child across settings.

The hope is that the child can indicate the want/need for different types of swings across settings which makes EVERYONE's life better because we are showing we are LISTENING.

4. Identification of client's language level

Be able to describe where the client is right-now across language areas for long-term goal planning to set-up language trajectory.

- Emergent
- Emergent Transitional
- Context-dependent
- Transitional independent
- Independent

Questions to ask yourself:

- Have I used the operational framework?
- What are peers expected at this time?
- What's the next set of vocabulary to teach?

Resources I like:

- The Dynamic Goals AAC Assessment Grid
- The Assessment of Learning Processes for AAC

SKILLS	ABILITY LEVEL				
	Emergent	Emergent Transitional	Context-Dependent	Transitional Independent	Independent
Understanding					
Expression					
Social Interaction					
Literacy Skills					
Other					

5. Identification of family's social-emotional state

When we talk about AAC with families, it is important to keep in-mind where the family is right now and get context for what that family could already be carrying regarding their child's voice.

The five stages of grief are as follows with some examples of things you might hear that indicates that this can be hard:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Making space to consider the complex emotions families can feel around AAC helps us to build healthy relationships with our families when things are hard.

(Kubler-Ross, 2009)

6. Validation

There is space to have healthy conversations about AAC no matter where the child, family, and team are in building a relationship with AAC.

Once the relationships are healthy and established across communication partners, how can we keep moving the client forward for their language trajectory?

pause

there is power
in space, in a breath,
in a pause
before you respond.
you get to choose.
hate or love.
anger or empathy
frustration or opportunity.
lonely or together.
irritation or understanding.
be kind.
pause.

words by rachel marie martin
findingjoy.net

7a. Teaching trajectory

Reference typical development for teaching (e.g., 3 years or 36 months)

- Pragmatics
- Semantics
- Syntax
- Phonology
- Literacy Socialization
- Phonological Awareness
- Phonological Awareness
- Print Knowledge
- Reading
- Writing

(Paul & Norbury, 2012)

7b. Teaching trajectory (3 years or 36 months)

Pragmatics	Topic continuation nears 50%, topics re continued by adding new information, some requests for clarification provided, language in play increases, narratives are "sequences," with theme but no plot
Semantics	Use and understanding of "why" questions, understanding and use of basic spatial terms (in, on, under, etc.)
Syntax	Brown's Stage 3:Modulation of Simple Sentences, present tense auxiliaries appear (can, will), be verbs used inconsistently., overgeneralized past-tense forms appear
Phonology	Speech is 75% intelligible, ability to produce rhyme emerges
Literacy Socialization	Learns the need to turn page to get to next part of story; learns left-to-right print progression, learns print is stable;anyone reaing a book reads same words
Phonological Awareness	Segment sentences into words, segment words into syllables, ecognize/produce rhymes, recognize/produce words with same beginning sound, segment/blend words by onset/rime
Print Knowledge	Learns alphabet song, learns to recognize and name letters, learns letters "have" sounds, learns clusters of letters separated by space form words
Reading	Learns to recognize name in print, may recognize environmental print (reads "McDonald's" sign)
Writing	Begins representation drawing, learns to write name, distinguished drawing from writing, learns to write some letters, may use invented spelling to label drawings

The best way for anyone to learn AAC, is to use AAC!

Summary

What *is* the practitioner practice that makes champion communicators?

- Modeling a healthy *relationship* with client's AAC device to all communication partners

You can do this by:
1. Naming the device
2. Collaborating on voicing and skin tone
3. Discussing vocabulary additions
4. Identifying a client's language level
5. Identifying potential family social-emotional state
6. Validating AAC
7. Establishing Teaching trajectory

All of these things, you could do in therapy, starting today!

Thank you & Questions

References

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