Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are a social communication disability and hence the social aspect of communication needs to be considered carefully with this population when exploring augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

Many children with ASD do not have sufficient natural speech to meet their daily communication needs. Therefore, it is not surprising that AAC has taken an increasing role in autism interventions.

Implementing AAC can be challenging – especially for children with ASD. They may appear to have little desire to communicate and their communicative interests may be more limited than other children who use AAC. So just providing a communication device to a child with ASD does not mean it will be used. The choice of device and our teaching strategies will be crucial to the success of AAC with children with ASD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the research says...</th>
<th>What this means for the AAC team...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is currently no evidence that AAC intervention hinders speech production in children with ASD. (Schlosser &amp; Wendt, 2008)</td>
<td>● Implement AAC as early as it is needed - don’t wait to see if natural speech develops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a significant lack of quality scientific studies that explore the use of AAC interventions with individuals with ASD. “implementation of AAC systems with this population will continue to be challenging and unpredictable”. (Randle, 2005)</td>
<td>● Ensure communication devices are trialled before purchase. ● Always set SMART goals and evaluate the success of any AAC interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a role for communication devices in interventions for children with autism. The exact role of voice output and the benefit to the child with autism remains unclear. (Schlosser &amp; Blischak, 2001)</td>
<td>● Exploring the use of communication devices with children with ASD is appropriate. ● Be sure to think about the individual needs of the child and adopt an ongoing review process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Progress in using AAC functionally is dependent upon the commitment and competence of the communication partner.” (Cafiero, 2010, pg. 3)
Communication Devices and ASD - More to Think About...

- Communication devices are very visual communication tools which plays to a strength of children with ASD – visual learning.
- Communication devices and other AAC strategies may help replace undesirable behaviours some children with ASD engage in to communicate their wants and needs.
- Our goal should always be functional spontaneous communication – so communication devices should be used to teach more than just requesting. They provide an opportunity to model and train children in social communication - greeting, commenting, questioning etc.

References

FIND OUT MORE

Autism Spectrum Disorders and AAC - Edited by Pat Mirenda & Teresa Iacono (Paul H. Brookes Publishing 2009)

http://joannecafiero.com/

http://www.setbc.org/setbc/topics/topics_aut_01.html

This handout is part of an information package, funded by a NGCS grant, to assist local teams in supporting children who require augmentative and alternative communication - particularly communication devices. Augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC, refers to other methods of communication people may use when they have difficulty speaking. These methods may supplement what speech they do use or may become the primary form of communication in the absence of speech.

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