Valuing ALL Forms of Communication

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) incorporates a range of different methods such as gestures, signing, communication boards and books, and communication devices in addition to any existing speech that the child may use. Therefore, we need to remember that AAC is not just about communication devices and build positive attitudes towards all methods of communication.

We can do this by accepting and modelling all forms of communication the child uses or is learning to use. It is helpful to think of a device as only one component of the child’s communication system. For example, if the child clearly said or signed ‘more’ you should not pretend that you haven’t understood him when you have, or insist that he use his device to communicate the same message. Instead you should reinforce his use of speech or sign by immediately responding to him. In addition, if he can say a particular word clearly it may be unnecessary to program the word into the device in the first place. If, however, you were concerned that people who were less familiar with him may have more difficulty understanding his speech or signs you may still choose to include these words on the device for him to use only with these people.

If we value all forms of communication, we ensure the child has a comprehensive AAC system that allows for:-

- **Device breakdowns** – when communication devices breakdown (as electronic equipment does now and then) the child can use his other forms of communication until the device is repaired and is not left without a voice.
- **Different partners, situations and environments** – some methods may work better with some people (eg. people working in shops or restaurants may not understand signing) or within certain environments (eg. using gesture and a laminated communication board may be better at bathtime than using a communication device).

**KEY POINTS**

- AAC is more than just communication devices.
- All forms of communication should be valued and encouraged.
- A range of communication methods ensures the child can communicate with all people, in all environments whatever the situation.

“No one communication mode (an AAC device, a low-tech board, gestures, signs, speech), for example, could possibly meet all my communication needs. I use multiple communication modes—I communicate in many ways. I select the best mode depending on the location, with whom I am communicating and the purpose and content of the communication.”

(Williams, 2004, pg. 1)
References

FIND OUT MORE

Read the *Alternatively Speaking* newsletter here:-

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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