

Successfully Using Communication Practices

Students with disabilities, like all students, must have the opportunity to *fully participate* in our public schools. An important part of participation is *communication* with others.



Many people, due to disability, cannot rely on speech alone to communicate. Having access to the tools and supports necessary to effectively express one's thoughts, needs, and desires is essential to making choices, decisions for one's self, and well-being.



Students with disabilities need to have access to the communication methods that work for them and need to be supported in communicating. Here are some of the top communication practices that you can do!

How to Support Your Child Successfully Using Communication Practices

1. Use Multi-Modal Communication

Encourage the student to use a variety of communicative forms, for a variety of purposes. The more opportunities to practice, the better communication becomes.

Multi-modal communication refers to the many ways people communicate with each other, including spoken language, written language, eye-gaze, facial expressions, gestures, signs, or combinations of these.

Acknowledge and Attribute examples:

"Your smile tells me you like ___"

"Yikes, crying tells me you don't want to ___; you are saying 'no'."

[A video example of acknowledging and attributing](#)

2. Acknowledge and Attribute

Acknowledge and attribute meaning to any potential communication effort even if the listener is not sure of the intended message. Acknowledge by sharing the communicative behavior and the intended message.

3. Access AAC Everywhere

Have both low-tech and high-tech AAC options available. Keep the same position of the symbol/word on the array to build motor planning.

Augmentative alternative communication (AAC) refers to communication methods (other than oral speech) used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas.

Examples: Speech-generating device; Low-tech vocabulary lanyard; A folder with a core array and fringe options; Illustration of science symbols/words along with questions words needed for participating in science.

4. Include Content Words

Access to content words is important for students with significant communications needs to participate in class discussions.

5. Encourage AAC Use

Encourage AAC use by the student without requiring it. Multi-modal communication makes it easier for an AAC user to communicate. Encourage and model AAC but do NOT require it.

Example: Motor planning is planning and carrying out a motor activity (finding words on a device).

Aided language modeling is modeling of the use of a student's AAC system by individuals in the environment who do not have significant communications needs.

6. Model, Model, and Model More

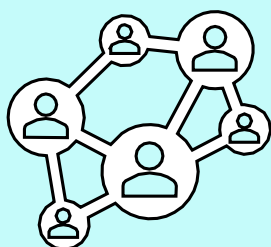
Aided language modeling is a highly effective AAC intervention strategy. The partner needs to slow down their speech so the student has time to process the message.

7. Wait Expectantly

Waiting for the student to start or respond encourages participation and improves communication. This is especially important if a motor response is required. Some students may need up to 30 seconds or more time to process the request and execute a response.



8. Teach Everyone

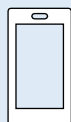


Everyone who interacts with a student with significant communications needs should be taught how the student communicates. This includes professionals, parents, paraprofessionals, and especially peers.

- Teach them to recognize all the communication forms the student uses.
- With permission, video clips of the student communicating can be a very helpful tool to share with others to help them learn how a student communicates.
- Teach everyone to use AAC with the student for a variety of purposes.

9. Be Prepared

Always have high tech devices, such as a communication device or iPad, charged, available and loaded with relevant symbols, words, etc.



10. Minimize Distractions

If using an iPad, minimize distractions or consider using a different device at first for communication vs. playing games or YouTube.

SUMMARY

Successfully assuring that a student with significant communication needs has access to and learns to utilize AAC requires a team.

★ This team includes all the Ps – **professionals, parents, and peers.** ★



This team expects communication, attributes meaning, ensures access to AAC, makes sure the student has access to words important for participating in class, encourages AAC use but does not require the student to use it, and waits for the student to respond.

Everyone benefits when we better understand one another, and when multi-modal communication is the norm in a classroom.



Resources

❖ [PrAACtical AAC](#)

- This website has a wealth of resources related to core vocabulary and implementation strategies. The site “supports a community of professionals and families who are determined to improve the communication and literacy abilities of people with significant communication difficulties.”

❖ [Project Core](#)

- This website operated by the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has many resources for educators and other school professionals related to core vocabulary.

Sources

- Biggs, E., Carter, E., & Gustafson, J. (2017). Efficacy of peer support arrangements to increase peer interaction and AAC use. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 122(1), 25–48. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-122.1.25>
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- Tobii Dynavox (2019). Boardmaker Symbols © used with permission.
- Adapted in part from Kearns, J., & Kleinert, J. (2020). Successfully using communication practices in the inclusive class (TIPS Series: Tip #4). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, TIES Center.
- [CommunicationFIRST](#) – the only nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the civil rights of the more than 5 million children and adults in the United States who, due to disability or other condition, cannot rely on speech alone to be heard and understood.
- Our mission is to protect and advance the rights, autonomy, opportunity, and dignity of people with speech-related disabilities through public engagement, policy and practice reform, and systemic advocacy.
- Official ADA website that is regularly updated with guidance and new court rulings <http://www.ada.gov/>
- ADA guidelines on Effective communication http://www.ada.gov/doe_doj_eff_comm/doe_doj_eff_comm_fact_sht.htm
- [10TipsUsingAACApp.pdf](#) (crsd.org)
- [When-to-Get-a-Speech-Eval.pdf](#) (kidspeech.com)