



Vocabulary for AAC UsersWhat to Choose and Why?

Communication is like a dance where we use our bodies and our words to express ourselves. Everyone communicates (body language, gestures, facial expression, verbally) and we do it in 3 ways: unintentionally, intentional but not symbolic, and intentional and symbolic. For us speaking individuals, using words to express our wants and needs is no big deal. For a nonverbal individual expressing themselves symbolically can be incredibly complicated. As a communication partner to an AAC User it's important that we not make it any more difficult for them. We need to be vigilante that we DON'T take all of the turns, bombard the person with questions or anticipate what they want thus taking away their communication opportunity. We need to motivate our students/children with Complex Communication Needs (CCN) to communicate as fully as possible. Below is information regarding communication displays ... giving AAC Users the "words" to use in their communication dance.

Things to Consider Before you make your Communication Display:

- Normal Language Development
 - Relational functions (greeting, negating, protesting, requesting, etc)
 - Semantic functions (agent, object, action, possession)
 - Semantic relations (two word combinations)
- Vocabulary is not Language
- Long range planning including the TEAM because otherwise
 - You will have an AAC system that is all nouns
 - Lack of organization of words
 - Everyone doing (or not) their own thing and very quickly it dies
- Change – this is not a finished product and you need to revisit it frequently.
- 96.3% of toddler vocabulary is 23 words (Banajee, DeCarlo, Stricklin, AAC 2003) and they are not noun labels

Communication Displays:

- Evaluate vocabulary needs *TEAM* work!!
- Involve the AAC User – you are building ownership
- Start off with activity based or situation displays
- Think about LANGUAGE needs not just noun labels – think CORE
- Visual needs (size, color, types of pictures, arrangement, & placement)
- Motor needs (limited range, weakness, erratic movements, tremors)
- As an individual needs change...so do communication displays!
- ALWAYS need a way to communicate it's not here or not what I want

Facilitating the Use of Aided Communication:

- Model what you expect
- Don't need to KNOW the symbol before we can use it – often in using it is we learn it
- Create a language learning environment – Don't test 24/7!
- Single word utterances are not always requests. Don't treat them as such.
- Follow the 3 R's: Routine, Repetition, and Reward (what your AAC User and you will get with successful communication!) Repetition with variety!
- 200 opportunities a Day in order to be successful
- Expectant Pausing! WAIT for your AAC User.

Types of Displays:

- Individual or classroom displays
- Single Word Utterance Displays (often picture word displays)
- Sentence creation
 - Must have at least 2 word groupings that can be combined to make sentences
 - Best to start with at least 3 symbols so that more than one sentence can be created
 - Sequencing and word order starts to be critical
 - Important for the AAC user to SEE the sequence of symbols. Create a “message window” if you are using paper displays. If using a speech generating device they often have a message window available.
 - Left to Right orientation becomes critical
 - Color coding of symbols helps visualize sequencing
- Games
 - Can be games themselves or as a display to communicate during a commercial, traditional or self-created game
 - Memory – Barrier game: The player looks at the sequence of symbols displayed and then it is covered. The player then has to remember and recreate the sequence as the game partner places cut up symbols in the message age. The paper is lifted and the result compared with the original. Then it is the opponent's turn. You could play this with real objects as well.
 - Games are a great way to practice (repetition!!) and develop communication skills. They also provide a great opportunity to socialize and interact – building friendships.
- Keyboards ABC or QWERTY are most popular.

Resources:

Carlson, Faith. Creating Communication Displays. Poppin and Company
Patti King-DeBaun
Gail Vantenhove, 2007