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ENRICHING CHILDREN'S LIVES

Strategies for Communication Partners of Individuals Using Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC)

One of the most important things to remember is that their AAC system is their voice!

- Make sure their AAC system is available to them at all times in all environments.
- Make sure that it is fully charged and in good working condition.
- Make sure that it is dedicated to that individual, for communication purposes only. It is not a toy to play games or watch videos on and no one else should be using it.
- Make sure that all communication partners communicate with one another to ensure all of the individual's communication needs are being met.

There are many different strategies that a communication partner can use to help an individual communicate effectively, using AAC!

1. Familiarize yourself with the vocabulary

Before you can model or provide examples to the individual of how to communicate using their AAC system, you must first become familiar with the system yourself. Explore the vocabulary and how to navigate within the system. This is a very important step.

2. Model how to use their AAC system (Aided Language Stimulation)

Aided language stimulation (ALS) is a communication strategy, where a communication partner teaches symbol meaning and models language by combining his or her own verbal input with selection of vocabulary on the AAC system. This is done by simultaneously selecting vocabulary on the AAC system and speaking.

3. Interact Functionally

It is important to establish an enjoyable shared interaction, be sure not to test or quiz the individual to locate things. Do NOT ask the individual to "find pizza," "show me toast," "touch McDonald's?" This is not functional or natural. Instead, you can say "What do you want?" "Do you want toast or cereal?" "Use your voice please."

4. **Create Communication Opportunities using Communication Temptations**

The concept is simple: create an environment in which the individual WANTS or NEEDS to communicate! Here are some examples of how you can setup the environment to tempt the individual to communicate:

- Offering the individual something to eat that you know he/she dislikes.
- Putting a toy in a clear container and shaking it to get the individual's interest.

5. **Expectant Delay**

This is providing extra wait time (10-15 seconds) to increase opportunities for communication. You can also look at the individual with your eyebrows raised (expectant look) to let them know you are waiting for them to have a turn.

6. **Asking Open Ended Questions**

Reducing your yes/no questions when appropriate will encourage more complex language and more rewarding interactions. For example, instead of asking "Did you have a good day at school?" try asking, "What happened at recess today?"

7. **Offer Choices**

Offer the individual choices so they can communicate what they want (snacks, activities, and clothing). For example "Would you like cheese or crackers?"

8. **Wait for them to Request**

Wait for the individual to tell you what they want/need, rather than giving it to them automatically.

9. **Communicating an idea to someone else**

Encourage the individual to communicate an idea directly to another person ("Tell dad what you did today").

10. **Expect Communication Beyond Requesting**

Make sure there are many opportunities to use the communication system for a variety of communication functions. It is easy to use communication systems for requesting, however, it can be used for many more reasons to communicate!

Always keep in mind that the most important predictor of success is a good communication partner and that the individual who is learning to communicate using a communication system requires strong, ongoing, hands-on support.

This will take a lot of time, work and commitment; however, the rewards are worth it!