#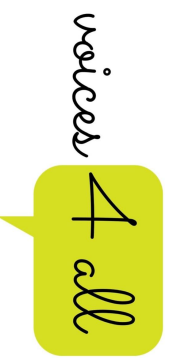 AAC, School-aged Transitions and Beyond: Considerations for Vocabulary Selection, Implementation and Access to AAC for Authentic Communication and Self Direction

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MSHA

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voices 4 all

About the Presenter

- SLP specializing in AAC: Cuyahoga Board of Developmental Disabilities
- Owner: Voices4All, LLC
- Member of ASHA, SIG 12
- Assistive Technology Professional through RESNA
- Co-founder and Co-director: Camp ALEC
- Medical Advisory Board Member: Hope for HIE
- Vice President, People Who Use AAC and their Families: USSAAC
- Mom to adult AAC user
- Love hiking in deserts, mountains, and sunshine, cooking and reading

Speaker Disclosures

Relevant Financial Relationships:

- Salaried SLP at Cuyahoga Board of Developmental Disabilities

- Receives compensation for evaluations, treatment, training and consultation related to private practice

- Received honoraria for this presentation

Nonfinancial Relationships:

- Co-founder and co-director, Camp ALEC

- Medical advisory board member, HOPE for HIE

- Vice president, People Who Use AAC and the Families, USSAAC

Objectives

Describe	communication autonomy
Describe	authentic communication
Name	3 considerations for vocabulary selection for all students using AAC
Discuss	3 critical elements of a transition plan for student using AAC

Communication Autonomy

- Communication is a human right

- Communication Bill of Rights constructed by National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities (NJC)

- "All people with a disability of any extent or severity have a basic right to affect, through communication, the conditions of their existence."

- https://www.asha.org/siteassets/njc/njc-communication-bill-rights.pdf

- Nice video overview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkkPGyQ4tfA

Authentic Communication

Communication is personally relevant and meaningful

**Reflects our own perspective and thoughts**

Spontaneous

Unexpected

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 Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system. This is done by simultaneously selecting vocabulary on the AAC system and speaking.

Use AAC to Teach AAC
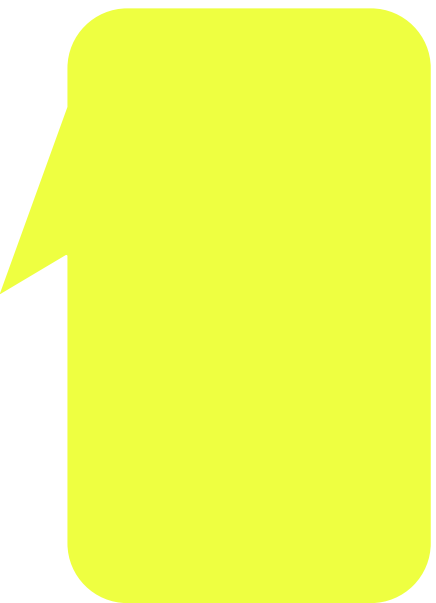
- By 18 months, babies have heard 4,380 hours of spoken language and we don't expect them to be fluent speakers yet.

- If AAC learners only see symbols modeled for communication twice weekly for 20-30 minutes, **it will take 84 years** for them to have the same exposure to aided language as an 18 month old has to spoken language.

Jane Korsten - QIAT Listserv 2011

We Need Flexible Vocabulary

Core Vocabulary is a term used to describe a relatively small set of words that are used most frequently in oral and written language. The words in a core vocabulary can be used to communicate for a broad range of purposes, from basic requesting of desired items to building social relationships, sharing opinions and exchanging information on topics of interest.

We Need Flexible Vocabulary

Fringe vocabulary refers to vocabulary that is more specific to a topic, environment, or individual. Fringe vocabulary is not generic and will likely not be used across environments, but in a certain setting with certain communication partners.

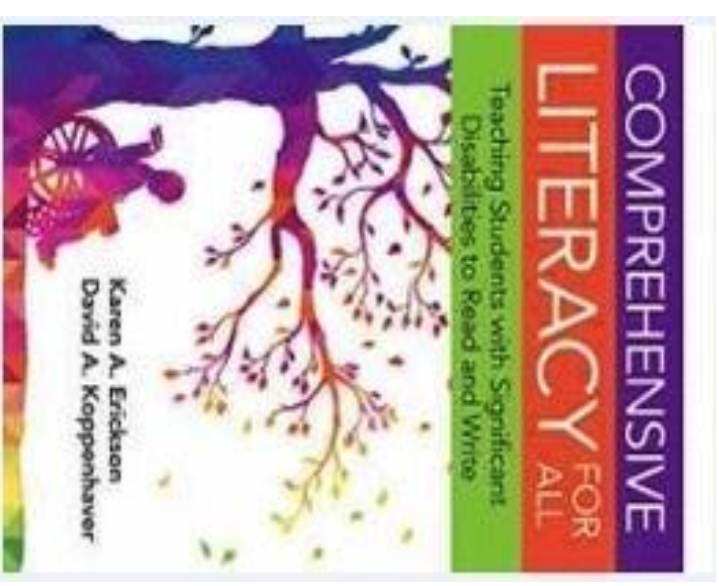i.e. talking about the Super Bowl - including specific teams and players

We Need Flexible Vocabulary

Quick Fires: Using phrases/whole sentences

- Frequently used
- Social greetings
- Directions for care
- Requests
- Facilitate communication partner understanding

Spelling

The only way an AAC user can say anything they want to say is if they can spell words

COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY FOR ALL

Teaching Students with Significant Disabilities to Read and Write

Karen A. Erickson
David A. Koppenhaver

Considerations for Vocabulary: Environments
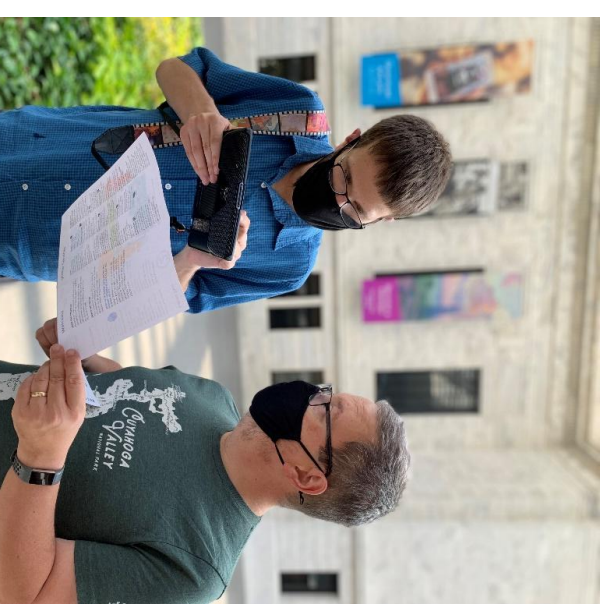
Environments:

- Home
- School
- Community
- Work
- Day programs
- Medical offices/appointments/ counseling
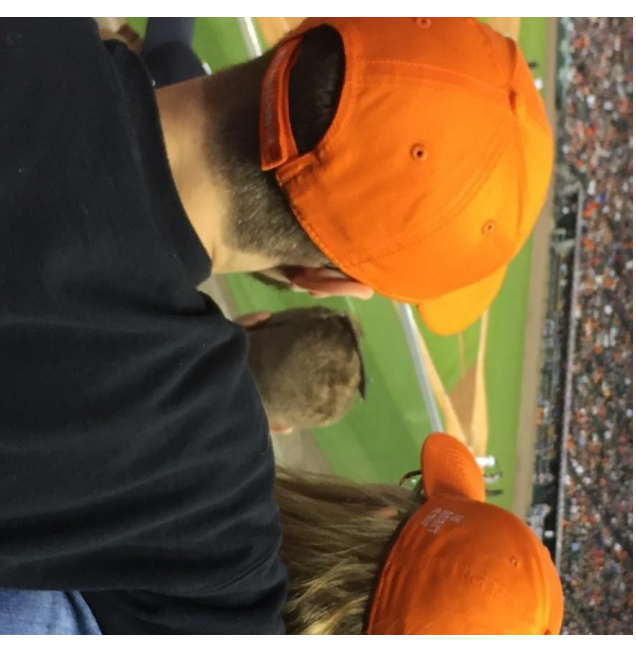
Considerations for Vocabulary: Communication Partners

Communication partners:

- Family members
- Caregivers
- Peers
- Supervisors
- Instructors
- Doctors, nurses, counselors
- Clergy
- Community helpers and customer service professionals

Considerations for Vocabulary: Mental Health

Alexithymia: difficulty in identifying and describing feelings and in distinguishing feelings from the bodily sensations of emotional arousal

"Many of us are misinformed and think happy is a 'good' emotion and sad is a 'bad' emotion."

"AAC users are often expected to be happy all the time"

"Children need to expand their vocabulary to express themselves authentically."

Stephanie Fassov, MA

Teaching the Expression of Emotions

- Model, model, model
- Move beyond the basics
- Acknowledge emotions without judgment
- Teach the skills by labeling emotions matching observable physical sensations and outward signs
- Use visual supports

Considerations for Vocabulary: Slang/Taboo

Definitions

- **Taboo** – concept/topic a particular group of people consider "socially unacceptable"

- **Profanity** – language that is considered "taboo"

- **Swearing/cursing** – using offensive/"taboo" words consider to be profane

- **Expletives** – exclamation or interjection / may or may not be considered swear/curse word

- **Slang** – "informal" language a particular group of people uses/may or may not be considered "taboo" or profanity

Strickler, H. (2022). *You Said What?! Exploring AAC Access to Swearing, Expletives, and Slang. ATIA 2022 Conference, Orlando, Florida, United States of America

Considerations for Vocabulary: Slang/Taboo

Slang

- Age appropriate
- Trendy
- May or may not be viewed as "taboo" or profane

Considerations for Vocabulary: Slang/Taboo

Swear Words

- Communication is a human right and AAC users have a right to use the same words/concepts as same-age peers
- Using these words is an empowering, personal choice
- Knowledge of and etiquette with taboo concepts/words is part of normal cognitive and sociocultural development
- Contribute to communicative competence

Taboo Vocabulary and Communicative Competence

- Linguistic
- Operational
- Social
- Strategic
- Psychosocial

Light, J., & McNaughton, D. (2014). Communicative competence for individuals who require augmentative and alternative communication: A new definition for a new era of communication? *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 30*(1), 1–18.

Why Use Profanity?

- Relate to peers/social reasons
- Express negative feelings and pain
- Gain attention
- Name calling/insulting
- Emphasis
- Humor
- Casual conversation/habit

Profanity Is Common

- 1% of speech consists of first-person plural pronouns (we, us, our)

- 0.5% of speech consists of swear words (Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003)

- Average speaker says 15,000-16,000 words a day and about 80-90 of these are taboo (Jay, 2009)

Profanity Is Developmental

- Swearing starts around age 2
- Children starting school will have a vocabulary of 30-40 "bad" words (younger children use more "milder" bad words and may not know "adult" meaning of them
- By ages 11-12, swearing is "adult-like"

Top Taboo Words for Children (in order of frequency)

Ages 1-2	Ages 3-4	Ages 7-8	Ages 11-12	All Children
poop(y)	jerk	stupid	fuck	shit
stupid	stupid	shit	fuck	fuck
butt	hate you	(oh my) god	damn	(oh my) god
fuck	(oh my) god	suck(s)	(oh my) god	stupid
shit	crap	bitch	stupid	damn
(oh my) god	shut up	boob(s)(y)	jerk	jerk
fart	damn	butt	hell	suck(s)
bad	shit	Shut up	asshole	crap
bitch	hell	fuck	bitch	hell
brat	poophead	Hate you	suck(s)	bitch

Jay, K. L., & Jay, T. B. (2013). A child's garden of curses: A gender, historical, and age-related evaluation of the taboo lexicon. *The American Journal of Psychology, 126*(4), 459-475.

Reporting Abuse

- Children with disabilities are 3.44 times more likely to be a victim of some type of abuse compared to children without disabilities. (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000)

- Children with intellectual disabilities are at twice the risk of physical and sexual abuse compared to children without disabilities (Crosse et. al., 1993).

- In a 2003 study of AAC users, 45% of 40 adult participants experienced crime or abuse and only 28% reported incidents to police (Bryen, Carey, & Frantz, 2003)

Directing Care and Self Advocacy

"Independent living is not doing things by yourself. It is being in control of how things are done."

Judy Heumann, Disability Rights Activist

Relationships, Dating and Sex

"People with complex communication needs require flexible AAC solutions that enable them to communicate in a variety of settings, including intimate moments in which both enjoyment and safety are vital."

Sellwood et al., 2022

Add All The Words

- Program vocabulary if they need/want assistance
- Advocate for the person
- Educate others, including parents

Provide Instruction On Using The Words

- Teach etiquette about using "taboo" words

- Model use of vocabulary in natural contexts like any other word

- Include lessons in directing others, self advocacy, self determination

Are You A Gatekeeper?

"Age, disability, and the discomfort of others are not reasons to deny someone the vocabulary they desperately need."

Donnie T.C. Denome

https://donnie.lgbt/2020/06/14/how-do-you-symbolize-intimacy-for-many-aac-programs-not-particularly-well/

Now That We Have The Vocabulary...

Transitions

- Teach and honor self determination at a young age
- Transition is not just about exiting school
- Consider what's important TO the student vs. what's important FOR the student – Erin Sheldon

Never Too Late For AAC

- Assess, reassess and reassess again
- Never too late to consider AAC
- Remember the AUGMENTATIVE aspect of AAC

Transitioning Within and Beyond School

- For students:
  - From classroom to classroom
  - From building to building
  - From one district to another
  - From high school to beyond graduation
- For adults
  - To new caregivers
  - To new day programs

Successful Transitions Are Key

- Students feeling supported
- Students learning self determination
- Avoiding device abandonment
- Ongoing AAC assessment to ensure continued success

SETT Framework and Ongoing Assessment

- Student
- Environment
- Tasks
- (Tools)

Devices AND services!

Technology is a tool that serves a set of educational goals, and if we don't think about what we want the technology for first, we end up with technology-driven solutions that have very little impact in the lives of children and in our educational system.

Linda Roberts, Director of Education Technology, U.S. Department of Education

Transition Plan

Should consider:

- Student
- Environment
- Tasks
- Tool (communication system and supports)

Transition Plan

Device - now

- Vendor, model, serial number, warranty
- Language, grid size, description of customized vocabulary
- Access and accessories
- Most recent AAC evaluation report and progress report
- Programming, backups, restoring from backups
- Manual
- Tutorials, YouTube Channels and more

Who owns the device?

Transition Plan

Device - in the future

- Evaluation
- Steps for next device
  - ○ Evaluation and trials
  - ○ Funding
  - ○ Timeframe and process
- Funding resources
  - ○ Medical insurance, Medicaid, Medicare
  - ○ Local and community funding
  - ○ Waivers
  - ○ Local organizations (Kiwanis, Elks, etc.)
  - ○ Crowd sourcing

Transition Plan

- Device - in the future
  - Grants
    - https://www.mjbfoundation.org/history
    - https://theorangeeffect.org
    - http://www.mccdcares.com
    - https://www.communityfundohio.org
    - https://trinityrose.org
    - https://www.itaalk.org

Transition Plan

Beyond the device

- Personal communication dictionary

Julie's Personal Communication Dictionary

Name: Julie
Date: 9/15/22
Review date: 1/1/2022
**People involved in completing form:** SLP, Intervention Specialist, Mom

What I may do	What it may mean	What you can do
Rock in my seat	I'm feeling anxious and overwhelmed	Model "I need a break" on AAC and offer ideas for sensory break
Laugh and clap hands	I'm excited/happy	Model "feel excited" or "feel happy" on AAC device
Tap chin with right thumb	I'm thirsty	Offer me a drink and model "I'm thirsty" on AAC device

Transition Plan

Beyond the device

- Personal communication dictionary
- Light tech system
  - "All-terrain" and back-up
  - Emergency preparation

www.picseepal.com

https://saltillo.com/chatcorner/content/29
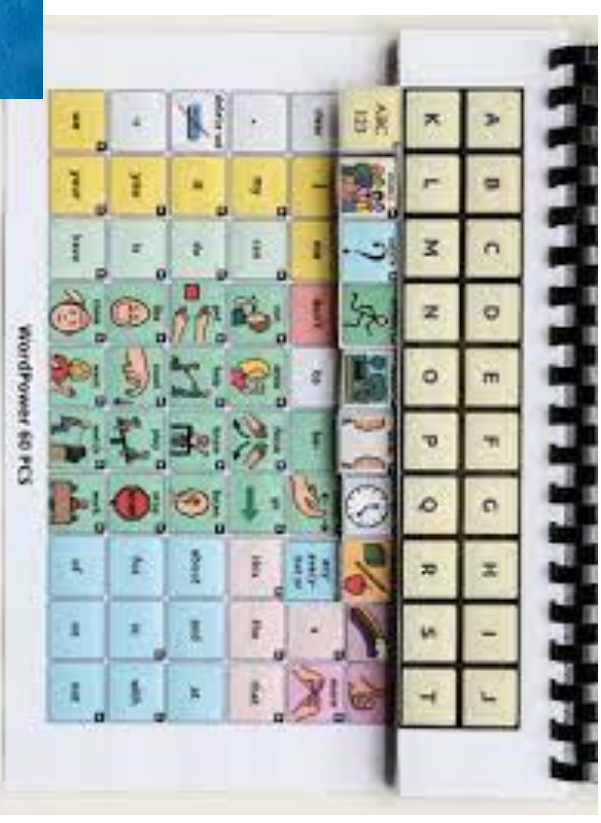
Transition Plan

Beyond the device

- People
  - Team members
  - Current and future communication partners
  - Qualities of a preferred communication partner
- Environments

Transition Plan

Beyond the device

- Support groups and AAC communities
  - ○ ISAAC Chats and ImpAACt Voices
- Invite AAC speakers to present
  - ○ AAC Speaker Connection
- Resources for therapy and assessment

Transition Plan

- Train the trainer
- Training plan components:
  - Goal: communication autonomy and authentic communication
  - Qualities of good communication partner
  - Device ins and outs
  - Light tech communication system
  - All modes of communication
  - Contacts for technical support
  - Networking and AAC community supports

Tools

AAC Transition Form

Personal Communication Dictionary

AAC Vocabulary Planning Forms

AAC Slang/Taboo/Swear Vocabulary Input Form

References and Resources

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Severe Disabilities*, 1-15.

References and Resources

Additional Resources:

Voices4All Blog: www.voices4all.wordpress.com

Rachael Langley, LLC: www.reachlanguage.com

Communication Bill of Rights: www.asha.org/nic/communication-bill-of-rights/

Center for Literacy and Disabilities Studies: www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/

LOMAH Podcast Literacy Series (episodes #131-145): www.lomah.org/season5

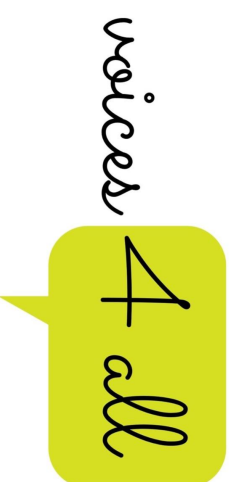Talking with Tech Podcast: www.talkingwithtech.org

Project-Core: www.project-core.com

USSAAC: www.ussaac.org

TechOWL: www.techowlpa.org

ImpAACt Voices: www.impaactvoices.org

Thank you! Questions?

voices **4** all

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