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Learn AAC

AAC Resources in 4 Languages!

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Learning objectives

Participants will learn:

1. to describe where and how to access AAC materials in 4 languages;

2. to identify key articles for supporting different AAC users;

3. to list insights from AAC users that can change our AAC practices.

AAC resources around the world

AAC in... English and Non-English speaking countries

English
Resources scattered

Other languages

Limited
Out of date

AAC community needs

Solid AAC knowledge….
in many languages!

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Part 1
Symbol-based

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Research and resources

- There were a wide range of sources available to develop articles about symbol-based AAC.

- Articles were written using the latest evidence base and best practice concepts.

- Articles written for parents, therapist, teams.

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Articles

Illustrations, quotes, references, links, fact sheets

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Learn AAC Guide

https://www.assistiveware.com/learn-aac/learn-aac-guide

Translation

Spanish, Dutch and French
Translated and checked by AAC professional

https://www.assistiveware.com/learn-aac/learn-aac-guide

These articles supported
communicators and
their teams, particularly
those who use symbols
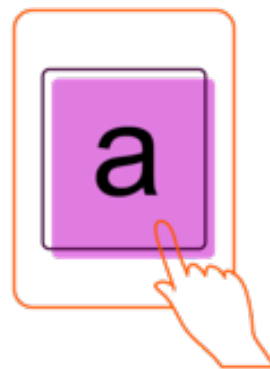to communicate.......

But what about those who type
to communicate…

What information do we have?
What information do we need?

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Part 2
Text-based

Research Project 2018

Step 1: Literature review

- Identified key roles in TB-AAC implementation
  (Finder, Facilitator, Mentor)

- Identified key unmet needs
  (Medical/care settings, Community, Groups, Topic setting,
  Communication Partner Behaviours)

- Identified mode of AAC
  (Multi-Modal, Symbol, Letter-by-letter, Social Media)

- Identified key populations
  (Developmental, Acquired: Progressive, Acquired: Stable)

Step 2: AAC User interviews

- Asynchronous interviews in private Facebook groups

- Recruited users from different populations:

  Developmental: autism, CP, intellectual disability
  Acquired, progressive: Parkinson's, motor neurone disease, ALS
  Acquired, stable: stroke, TBI, MS
  Acquired, cognitive-communication: aphasia, dementia

AAC User interviews - Questions

- What is important to you in your communication?

- What is working/not working in your communication in various contexts (work, school, community, relationships)?

- What are helpful communication partner behaviours?

- What would you tell the speaking world (communication partners, families, SLPs, educators)?

Our assumptions were all blown up

- Most AAC users used both symbols and text
- Did not experience a simple progression from symbol-based to text-based AAC
- Considered most support strategies universal
- **Regardless of diagnosis, fewer than 10% had experienced evidence-based AAC support**
- **Regularly misunderstood or go unheard despite fluent AAC use**
- **Biggest challenge they consistently face is the behaviour of speaking people**

Use literature and user research

- Articles written with new information.

- Information across the lifespan regardless of diagnosis.

- Articles written for everyone, including AAC users themselves.

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Part 2
AAC for all!

New Insights

Universal

AAC is universal, speech is only for some. All people use AAC.

Social media and other asynchronous modes of communication are more accessible and inclusive, especially when conversing with speaking people.

Speaking people need to improve their communication skills with AAC users.
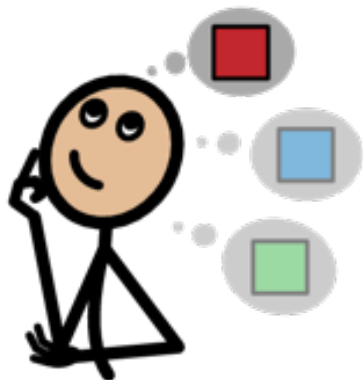
Access

Consider alternative access.

Fine motor skills may not equate to direct access, all the time.

AAC users with good fine motor control may need multiple alternative access strategies, (e.g., Partner Assisted Scanning or eye gaze during moments of crisis, as the day progresses, in different contexts).

Decision-making

AAC user decides:
- changing the vocabulary
- selecting or changing the voice
- when to use AAC versus other ways to communicate
- how and when to be supported or prompted
- who gets to see the screen, the vocabulary, and the history

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"Choice in communication is huge. I don't solely use my device to communicate, at least with my family. Sometimes I vocalize (often for yes-no questions), or point, or give thumbs up or thumbs down. A new one has been, when given multiple options, holding up a number of fingers for which option I prefer, which has been helpful when out walking without ready access to my phone or iPad."

~ Darla Burrow, AAC user

Privacy

- checking message history
- checking vocabulary
- watching the AAC user while they construct a message
- modelling their AAC on their device?
- asking permission
- teaching the user that this is THEIR voice

Purpose

AAC is also a visual support
- AAC is not just a prosthetic for speech
- AAC is also a visual support, used for/by the person
- social media is AAC
- t-shirts, buttons, texting, messaging can all be AAC
- AAC can be a visual schedule
- AAC can be a prompting strategy/list

Personalize

- your voice is your identity: it reflects your background, culture, gender identity, age
- "AAC dysphoria"
- the vocabulary of your passions is not core words

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Other stuff we can talk about

Learn how to be a
Person-centered communication partner

All AAC users need to be supported in a way that is specific and personal to them. Good communication partners are respectful and patient to AAC users. They listen and wait, and ask about how they can support the AAC user better.

"My partner is my favourite person to communicate with.
He's very understanding and I never feel judged by him.

If I'm using speech and begin to struggle he will prompt me to get my iPad out (I often forget). He waits for me to type or find symbols in Proloquo2Go.

He is completely understanding of how I may switch back and forth between AAC and verbal speech.
It doesn't faze him or make him value one form of communication more than the other.

He values me communicating, however that may be.
He listens."

~ Oliver Waite, AAC user

Importance of Social Media

Social media is its own form of AAC. When AAC users have access to different social media platforms, it can open a world of possibilities and enhance the communication and relationships with the people around them.

"I think social media assists communication partners and non-disabled peers to understand capacity.
When people meet me in person, they often use two word sentences.
Those who have interacted with me on social media will treat me as the educated, insightful person I am."

~ Johanna Schmidt, AAC user

Part-time AAC users

People choose to use AAC if it
improves their communication.

"Remember not all AAC users have no verbal speech.
Some of us have voluntary verbal speech.
Some of us of involuntary verbal speech.
Some of us have both voluntary and involuntary verbal speech.
Some of us have verbal speech sometimes and not other times." **Oliver Waite**.

"The goal should not be verbal speech but good communication." **Alyssa
Hilary**.

"Understand that sometimes I am able to use my voice and sometimes I have
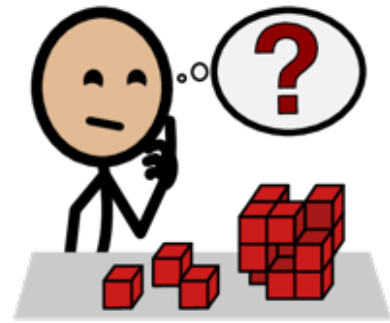to use AAC." **P Matthew Stinson.**

Real choices, real control

Support for decision-making
when you cannot speak
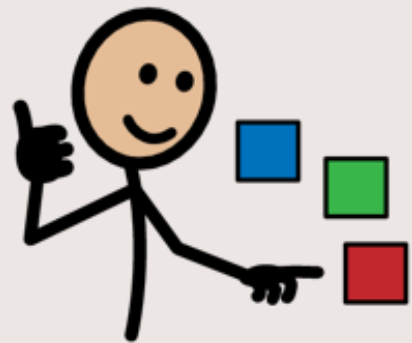
Safe and secure
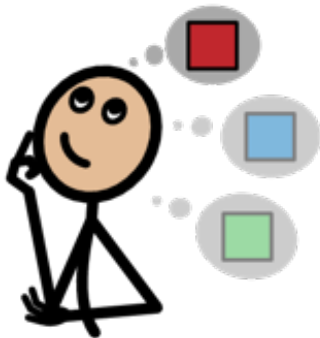
Reduce vulnerability for
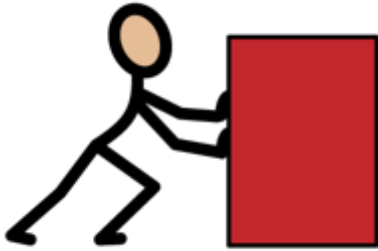nonspeaking people
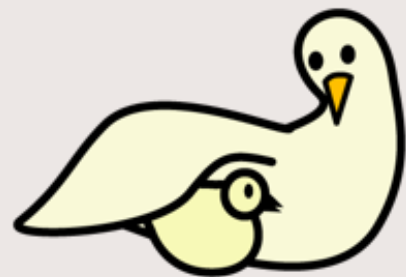
Thought change in AAC

Broaden our ideas as to who might be **eligible and benefit from AAC**, even those that speak can benefit from AAC.
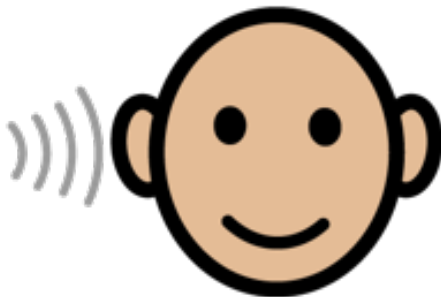
Less focus on **speech.**
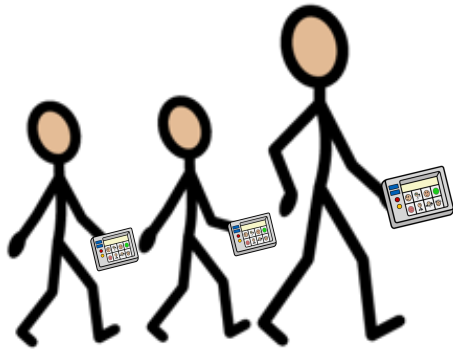**More** focus on **communication.**

Respect the AAC user as the
person who decides
when, **how**, and **to whom**
they wish to communicate

Shift the work of accommodating AAC (and removing barriers) to **communication partners**

Teach communication partners to be good listeners: Just ask. Just observe.

Actively support and seek AAC role models and mentors.

Presume that **all AAC users** need access to the **same toolkit of strategies** to be heard.

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Everything in one place!
AAC for all!
In 4 languages!

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