

Myth: AAC should not be used with children who have some speech

When the idea of AAC is suggested for a child, a caregiver might say:



- "Why? He says a few words or sentences really well."
- "I can understand him/her at home...in school...in therapy."
- "He can say full sentences after me."
- "She repeats whole sentences that she hears in movies or on TV."
- "We are going to wait and see if speech improves."
- "We don't want her to rely on the computer and not learn speech."

Let's take another look at these statements again and ask some additional questions.

- "He says a few words or sentences really well." What about increasing his vocabulary?
- "I can understand him at home...in school...in therapy." What about other people?
- "He can say sentences fully after me." -- What about when you are not there?
- "She repeats whole sentences that she hears in movies or on TV." Are those appropriate responses in every conversation? How does she carry on a conversation?
- "We are going to wait and see if speech improves." How long will you wait? A week, a month, a year? What about all the language learning and experience that he/she will miss?
- "We don't want her to rely on the computer and not learn speech." How will she communicate while you are working on speech?



The question we have to ask is, "Would you consider any of the statements we posed at the beginning to be FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION?" Functional communication means expressing needs, wants, feelings, and preferences that others can understand. Maybe the child has functional communication with people who are very familiar to them, but what about for those who are not? What about learning and developing language? We need to look more closely at the benefits as well as costs to children with speech impairments, who have "some speech" and how AAC might enhance their overall communication interactions and language development.

Cost of Assuming

Let's look at a few scenarios that may be successful if a familiar listener assumes meaning accurately, but how that might change if they do not

Familiar Listener Assuming Accurately	Unfamiliar Listener or Inaccurate Assumptions
<p>John looks out of the window and says, "car." His teacher responds, "Your mom will be here at 3:30."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What if he wanted to point out a car that he

<p>We need to keep working.”</p>	<p>saw out the window?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What if he wanted to know if it was time to go but a substitute teacher was there for the day?
<p>Carol and her brother are in the grocery store. Carol points to the magazines at the checkout. Her brother says, “Oh, that’s right. We need to get the mom’s cooking magazine.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What if Carol was pointing out something interesting on one of the magazine covers? • What if she wanted to buy one of the magazines for herself? • What if her friend was with her rather than her brother and instead of coming home with a cooking magazine, they bought a tabloid?
<p>Chris enters the room and produces a story in which the word, “daw” is produced several times. Her mother or therapist knows that “daw” is “dog” and asks Chris yes and no questions to figure out the rest of the story.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What if Chris’s mother or therapist don’t ask the right yes/no questions to figure out what Chris is trying to communicate? • What if Chris used the word “daw” with someone other than her mother or therapist and that person thought Chris was talking about a “duck” or a “doctor”? • How would Chris make friends or participate in school with limited vocabulary?

Think about these situations for yourself.



- How do you feel when someone finishes your sentence but does it incorrectly?
- How do you feel when someone assumes they know what you want, think or feel?
- How would you like to interact with only the same one or two people?
- What would it be like to be able to produce only a few words or sentences that people could understand?
- What would it be like if you were able to communicate by repeating the last word(s) said by others or by producing lines from movies or television shows?

This limits a child’s ability to communicate outside the circle of those who are very familiar to him. A person with severe communication impairment cannot effectively establish or deepen relationships with others or demonstrate new knowledge or thoughts¹. Use of AAC as part of an overall communication system can assist in avoiding these costs.

Another question many parents and therapists may have is how best to balance working on functional communication through AAC and needed practice with natural speech during therapy sessions and in the classroom. Occasionally caregivers do not want to use valuable therapy time to work on anything but natural speech goals but what does research say about it

Researchers² studied the impact of working on both speech and AAC at the same time – a dual paradigm approach. They observed improvements in overall functional communication when this approach was used throughout their speech therapy and classroom groups. This led the authors to recommend that both caregivers and therapists need to consider the benefits of addressing AAC strategies along with natural speech to improve functional communication.

Role of AAC

First and foremost, AAC works with other methods of communication for all of us. For a child with a severe communication impairment, it helps them avoid the costs that can come from limited communication. AAC provides a means of:

- Communicating more understandably
- Expressing the exact message one wishes to produce
- Interacting with less familiar people
- Sharing messages that are “outside the norm” for a particular routine
- Communicating with greater independence
- Being seen by others as being a more competent communicator
- Participating in longer and deeper interactions
- Improving language and communication skills

Let’s take another look at the previous scenarios and see what might happen if each used AAC including a communication device as part of their overall system.

Depending on Familiarity of Listener	Using AAC
<p>John looks out of the window and says, “car.” His teacher responds, “Your mom will be here at 3:30. We need to keep working.”</p>	<p>John looks out the window and says, “car” and produces “look” with his communication device. His teacher looks out the window and says, “Yes, that is a fancy car.”</p>
<p>Carol and her brother are in the grocery store. Carol points to the magazines at the checkout. Her brother says, “Oh, that’s right. We need to get a cooking magazine for mom.”</p>	<p>Carol says “That is too bad.” with her AAC device while pointing at a magazine cover to her brother. The cashier adds a comment, “Can you believe that?”</p>
<p>Chris enters the room and produces a story in which the word, “daw” is produced several times. Her mother or therapist knows that “daw” is “dog” and asks Chris yes and no questions to figure out</p>	<p>Chris uses her device to tell her mother or therapist what happened with the dog. It turns out to be something her mother or therapist would never have guessed. In addition, Chris is able to tell the</p>

the rest of the story.	story to her grandmother on the phone, to her neighbor, her friend and the sales person at the store.
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In each of these scenarios, the use of AAC provided a way for these individuals to improve their interaction and increase their independence. AAC can encourage improved participation and independence in all environments and with a variety of communication partners.

References

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