

HEALTH & SAFETY: AAC

“Augmentative/Alternative Communication (AAC)”

BQIS/Outreach Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life.

Objectives

Readers will learn the definition, categories, and benefits of Augmentative Communication.

Readers will learn basic information regarding AAC decision making.

Definitions

Communication: A process by which information is exchanged between two or more individuals through a common set of behaviors or symbols.

Augmentative/Alternative Communication (AAC): The ways, other than speech, that are used to send a message from one person to another (ASHA, 2005).

Facts

- Examples of AAC include:
 - Communication boards/books/picture symbols
 - Voice output communication devices (VOCAs) now referred to as (SGD) Speech Generating Device
 - Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
 - Eye Gaze
- Types of AAC:
 - **Low Tech Systems:** Refers to any simple system that is easy to use and does not require electrical power (Real Objects, Natural Gestures, Sign Language, Picture Boards, Object Boards)
 - **Elementary Tech Systems:** The mid-level of technology devices that do not require a great deal of learning time and are battery operated (Simple Switches) (One Step Communicator, Twin Talk, Big Mack, Talking Picture Frame)

- **High Tech Systems:** The most complicated systems. These require some kind of programming and often involve a significant amount of user training to effectively establish the system (Dynavox, Chat Box)
- AAC helps the individual:
 - Control his/her environment
 - Request Wants and Needs
 - Express Feelings
 - Supplement Existing Language
- AAC is not:
 - Giving up on Speech
 - Only for those with a certain IQ
 - Only the job of the Speech Pathologist
 - Just “High Tech” devices
 - A “one time only” endeavor
 - Something that is only used at home
- AAC can be a vehicle for developing:
 - expressive language
 - receptive language
 - literacy
 - control over the environment
 - communication initiation
- **80/20 Rule:** Augmentative Alternative Communication is 80% planning and 20% programming.
- If the person is unable to communicate effectively, they may benefit from augmentative communication.

Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Designing Communication Boards:
 - Physical considerations: ensure the size and presentation is appropriate in meeting the physical capabilities of the individual. (size of pictures, format, transportable wherever the person goes and accessible to person at all times)
 - Visual Considerations: Determine what visual characteristics are appropriate (black/white or color)
 - Language/Cognitive Considerations: match complexity of language to abilities of the individual (single word vs. phrase, pictures vs. line drawings)
2. Choose the Appropriate System:
 - Individuals who are Blind: Obviously cannot benefit from visual systems therefore a touch system may be more appropriate

- Individuals who are Deaf: May benefit from visual input if that is their strength. Deaf individuals may not understand verbal language but they may still have a voice output system that they learned to use because they were visually taught to touch the button and staff immediately performed the message the system indicated.
 - Deaf and Blind Individuals: Deaf and Blind Individuals often require a tactile/touch system because understanding touch/sense related symbols is their greatest strength.
 - ID/DD Individuals may require several types of input at once to understand.
3. If you feel an individual may benefit from AAC, contact a Speech Language Pathologist.
 4. If a person has an AAC system:
 - Keep an extra set of batteries (if applicable)
 - Ensure device is kept clean
 - Ensure device is with the person in all settings and is readily available
 - Ensure staff are trained in how to use device

Learning Assessment

Questions that can be used to verify a person's competency in the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. True or False: The use of AAC is directly related to an individual's IQ.
2. True or False: AAC is used to replace the individual's existing language.
3. True or False: The use of AAC is 80% programming and 20% planning.
4. When designing a communication board, you should take into account:
 - A. Physical strengths
 - B. Visual strengths
 - C. Language/cognitive strengths
 - D. All of the above
5. AAC helps the individual:
 - A. Give up on their speech
 - B. Express their feelings
 - C. Control their environment
 - D. Both B and C

References

American Speech and Hearing Association

Augmentive Communication, Inc. www.augcominc.com

James M Bailey, MCD-CCC-SLP

Related Resources

Developing Communication and Enhancing Interaction Training class-Outreach

“Basic Communication” Fact Sheet

Learning Assessment Answers

1. False
2. False
3. False
4. D
5. D

Outreach Services

outreach@fssa.in.gov • DDRSOutreach.IN.gov

As a service for persons supporting individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, BQIS/ Outreach developed the Outreach Fact Sheet Library. The information provided is designed to enhance the understanding of the topic and does not replace other professional or medical instructions or individually developed plans. For more fact sheets and information, please visit DDRSOutreach.IN.gov.



Indiana Family & Social Services Administration
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