



Communication Systems Overview

“Any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge or affective states” is the definition of communication by the National Joint Committee for Communication. All people have the right to communicate, and teaching communication skills is critical to the education of individuals with disabilities.

The need for assistive technology (AT) is addressed specifically in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) giving schools specific responsibilities with regard to AT. Schools are required to assess the need for AT and to provide it to individuals with disabilities when it is necessary for them to receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE).

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to methods of communication that support the communication of individuals who do not speak; however, an individual does not have to be non-verbal to benefit from AAC. Some individuals speak, but their speech is so difficult to understand that they need help in getting their message across. Access to AAC for these children and youth is seen as central to developing the individual's potential for forming relationships, participating in their education, gaining employment, and becoming independent.

There are no pre-requisite skills for AAC—You can start at any age or developmental level. The term AAC does not refer to any one specific method of communication. AAC is composed of different methods of communication including: speech, vocalizations, gestures, sign language, picture boards, and communication devices.

When using communication devices to support an individual's communication, the team should gather information about the individual's communication abilities and needs in everyday routines. Then a “feature match” is conducted so that the individual's needs may be matched to the features on a variety of communication devices.

When selecting messages to be input into the communication device, include messages that are important to the child/youth, appropriate to their age, gender, interests and life experiences. Start with opportunities for the individual to use the AAC system to play with others and have fun because learning alternative communication methods can take effort. Ensuring that the activities the individual is engaged in are enjoyable can make the learning process easier.

Providing AAC and other assistive technologies to an individual as a part of their educational program is a legal requirement for public schools. School districts are responsible for: evaluating the need for AAC, obtaining a device, training the student, family and professionals to use the device, and the maintenance, repair, and replacement as needed. AAC can make the difference between communication and silence.



REFERENCES

ASHA. (2004). *Roles and responsibilities of speech-language pathologists with respect to augmentative and alternative communication: Position statement*. Retrieved April 8, 2011 from <http://www.asha.org/docs/html/PS2005-00113.html>

Banajee, M., DiCarlo, C., & Buras-Stricklin, S. (2003). Core Vocabulary Determination for Toddlers. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 2, 67 - 73.

Glennen, S., & Decoste, D. (Eds.). (1997). *Handbook of augmentative and alternative communication*. San Diego: Singular Publishing Group.

Lloyd, L., Fuller, D., & Arvidson, H. (Eds.). (1997). *Augmentative and alternative communication: A handbook of principles and practices*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

The National Joint Committee for the Communicative Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities. (1992). Guidelines for Meeting the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities. *ASHA*, 34(Suppl. 7), 1-8.

Internet Resources

OCALI Assistive Technology Resource Manual 2008

http://www.ocali.org/view.php?nav_id=60

Overview and Definition of AAC

<http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/AAC.htm>

AAC Basics - Assistive Technology Training Online Project at the University of Buffalo

<http://atto.buffalo.edu/registered/ATBasics/Populations/aac/>

Listing of Types of AAC Devices - AAC TechConnect

<http://www.aactechconnect.com/aacinfo.cfm>

Review of common myths and fears associated with using AAC with young children

<http://aac.unl.edu/yaack/b2.html>

Resources for vocabulary for AAC

<http://aac.unl.edu/>

Center for AAC and Autism

<http://www.aacandautism.com/>