

How Do the Rules of Communication Change with Augmentative and Alternative Communication?

- Communication is slower
- To get a message across, content is more important than grammar
- The AAC user may need to be provided with opportunities to take a turn
- The AAC user may not always have access to all of the vocabulary they need
- The listener may need to be in close proximity to the AAC user
- The listener may need to pay more attention to what the AAC user is doing
- The listener needs to share an understanding of how the AAC system works
- The listener may need to take a more active role in interpreting the message
- The listener may need to clarify the content of the message

Communicating with Low-Tech AAC Display

- Ensure the patron's display is in front of them
- Establish how the patron indicates "yes" and "no"
- Find out how the patron uses their display either by asking them to show you a particular word, or by searching their tray for written instructions
- Ask only one question at a time
- As the patron points to their symbols to convey a message, it is important to keep track of the message:
 - Verbalize each symbol or letter aloud as they point to it
 - As the letters and symbols form into words and sentences, speak the message as you understand it, and check that you understood it correctly
 - It may be useful to jot the message on a piece of paper, particularly for longer messages
- If you are unclear about a message, ask questions to clarify
- Be sure to respond to all communication modes (facial expression, vocalizations), not just the display

For more information:

[Communication Disabilities Access Canada](#) (CDAC) is a Canadian, non-profit organization that promotes social justice, inclusion and accessibility for people who have speech, language and communication disabilities, not caused by significant hearing loss.

Adapting Storytimes for Non-Verbal Children

Add Symbols

Make stories and songs highly visible by adding symbols right in books or by adding pictures to songs. These symbols/pictures point out main concepts and allow children to comment or ask questions.

Add Props

Props help children attend and make learning more concrete. Props can be real items (eg. a windmill spinner to accompany the book "The Wind Blew"), pretend items (eg. plastic animals to accompany the song "The Old Woman who Swallowed a Fly") or made-up items (eg. props made of enlarged symbols and foam backing, or felt kits.)

Selection of Stories and Songs (choice-making)

Allow children to choose the story/song that they most enjoy. Choices can be made using any selection method (eg. pointing, eye-gaze, picture symbols). Choices may be organized on a story/song board constructed out of bristol board. Symbols can then be attached to the choice board with velcro.

Initiate Conversation

Have symbols handy that represent personalized topic starters such as "My favourite book is Very Hungry Caterpillar. What's yours?", "Let's sing. I can pick the song" for each children, allowing them to initiate conversation with peers on topics that interest them. They also provide the opportunity for multiple turns in the conversation.

Repetitive Reading/Singing

Stories and songs become more familiar and predictable as they are read/sung again and again. Children's levels of understanding increase with each repetition. Repetitive lines (eg. "But he was still hungry!") allow multiple opportunities for children to participate and to respond independently with familiar lines. Pause and wait expectantly (approximately 10 seconds) for children to respond. Always reinforce responses or model the appropriate response if children do not respond.

Active Participation

Involve children in physically manipulating the book/props. "Page fluffers" can be added to books to make them easier to turn. Paper clips can be used to separate pages. Props can be made the appropriate size to be easily grasped and attached to a book/song board with velcro.

Positioning

Know where to hold the book so each child can see – this will vary from child to child. Instead of sitting stationary in a storytime, "rove" and interact with each child. Oversize books and books with high contrast help children with low vision.

Talk

Talk about what happens in the story or try to predict what might happen. Share your love of literature and spread the joy of reading!

Selected Resources

Picture Books that Invite Participation

Breakstone, Beth

Interactive Storybooks, featuring Picture Communication Symbols© from Mayer-Johnson.

<https://www.janellepublications.com/7077.shtml>

Campbell, Rod

Dear Zoo

Carter, David

If you're a Robot and you Know It

Christelow, Eileen

Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed

Five Little Monkeys Count and Trace

Faulkner, Keith

The Wide Mouthed Frog

Fleming, Candace

Go to Sleep in Your Own Bed

Fleming, Denise

In the Small, Small Pond

In the Tall, Tall Grass

Mama Cat Has Three Kittens

Riley, Linnea

Mouse Mess

Rueda, Claudia

Huff and Puff

Van Fleet, Matthew

Moo

Williams, Sue

I Went Walking

OLA Super Conference

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