

Practical AAC Strategies for Early Communicators with Autism and Other Disabilities: Pre-Intentional to Symbolic Communication

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ABSTRACT

Although there are no prerequisites to AAC, it is difficult for us to plan how to plan AAC interventions for basic communication interactions. Switches or symbols can be introduced into interactions for the most basic communicators, if they are used in ways that support and enhance the child's (or adult's) existing interaction strategies. Introducing new communicative functions or complexity of interactions can address too many "hard things" at once, so we may introduce new strategies, functions or symbols through behaviors, tasks, and partner behaviors at first. Case studies and videotapes will illustrate building on children's existing behavioral skills and simplifying the complexity of children's uses of AAC, to gradually scaffold their understanding of the multiple layers of complexity in AAC use, even when beginning with prelinguistic communication skills. The first day of this workshop will present a variety of strategies for assessing and facilitating augmented communication in children and adults, beginning from nonsymbolic behaviors to symbolic skills. We will include specific strategies for getting past situations where we may feel stuck or experience unexpected difficulties in meeting communication goals of basic communicators and their partners. The focus will be on multimodal interaction and meeting the communicative goals of the communicator and partner, rather than on matching specific modalities to children or purposes. Participants will apply information from the handouts and presentation to live demonstrations and videotaped samples of communication in a variety of children with severe and multiple communication impairments. Sample intervention goals will be provided to characterize different aspects of effective intervention for partners and contexts as well as the children served.

The second day of the workshop will focus more specifically on effective intentional and symbolic AAC for children with ASD who may not easily initiate social interactions with partners for shared communicative purposes. We need to be aware of the implications of our intervention approaches that are applied to ASD that differ in their focus on social/communication, language/cognitive, or behavioral/speech skills. Capitalizing on the strengths and limitations of each of these types of approaches can maximize the effectiveness of our multimodal interventions and provide mechanisms for adapting intervention when breakdowns or limited progress occurs. It can be relatively easy to determine why intervention approaches have been unsuccessful, but difficult

planning alternative strategies particularly for very early communicators with ASD who already have limited communication strategies. While all of the primary approaches to intervention for children with ASD have effectiveness at addressing the skills for which they are designed, only some of those approaches are effective at helping children with ASD initiate their own communicative messages for practical and meaningful social purposes. Socially-based intervention strategies can be critical for getting past prompt-dependency in children who may wait for partner prompting or specific environmental contexts to convey communicative messages. We will include intervention strategies that take advantage of interactive strengths of children with ASD, including AAC strategies that take advantage of visual, predictable, and social routine aspects of early interaction. Commonly used intervention approaches for children with ASD will be compared and adapted systematically to address specific communication goals in video and live demonstrations. Additional intervention approaches and educational goals that enhance the social interaction deficits that are central characteristics of early communicators with ASD will be demonstrated and practiced.

LEARNER OUTCOMES

- Identify common sources of difficulty for AAC intervention with basic communicators, including children with ASD
- Assess communication addressing a variety of functions, even among very basic communicators
- Plan communication goals in small and achievable steps for basic communicators
- Identify complications introduced for children who rely on AAC and their partners that differ from children who are primarily vocal communicators
- Apply intervention strategies for planned basic communication and symbolic goals including multiple behavioral and augmented modes
- Compare and contrast theoretical approaches and intervention models applied to children with ASD
- Identify strategies for working around complications introduced for children with both ASD and CCM
- Apply intervention strategies for planned basic communication and symbolic goals in ASD including multiple behavioral and augmented modes