

Overcoming Behaviors to Drive Effective Communication with AAC

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Introduction

- ❑ Speech Language Pathologist and AAC/AT Support Specialist for Hudson School District
- ❑ Private practice owner (Express Yourself Speech Therapy LLC)
- ❑ Have worked in the AAC world doing evaluations, therapy, consultation and coaching in a variety of therapeutic environments and roles since 2013
- ❑ From Cleveland, Ohio
- ❑ Have two daughters (10, 12)
- ❑ Disclosures: Member of ASHA, received complimentary registration

Does this sound familiar?

They are not looking He taps and taps and taps... and taps...

They have no interest in the device *She doesn't pay attention to it*

She throws it!

The device is a toy to them

What About You?

What issues are you facing that I did not mention?

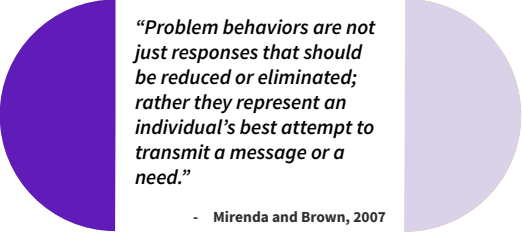
Which of the issues mentioned in the previous slide are you struggling with the most?

Objectives

1. Will be able to identify behaviors related to AAC which can impede successful use of a communication system
2. Recognize reasons behaviors related to AAC might exist
3. Provide three possible solutions or strategies to try in an effort to overcome behaviors and more effectively access language
4. Define part-time AAC use and how lack of consistent or appropriate access can lead to behaviors
5. Identify possible therapist/parent mindset barriers leading to limited AAC growth

Quick definitions

- ❑ AAC: Alternative and Augmentative Communication
 - ❑ High tech, low tech, mid tech, sign language
 - ❑ Alternative AND/OR Augmentative
- ❑ Behavior
 - ❑ Not always negative
 - ❑ Huge topic! For today's presentation, related to the device/system itself only.



"Problem behaviors are not just responses that should be reduced or eliminated; rather they represent an individual's best attempt to transmit a message or a need."

- Mirenda and Brown, 2007

Ask Yourself...

- ☐ Has behavior changed recently, and if so are there other reasons for that behavior?
- ☐ What is going on in the environment when the behavior happens?
- ☐ Am I (or is someone else) trying to control the situation or communication?
- ☐ Is the person I am working with regulated and ready to learn and participate in this moment?
- ☐ Is this the right system/device?

Fundamental Assumptions

Everyone can learn to use AAC.

If it is not working, we (or the system or the environment) are the problem – **NOT** the student.

There is a tool for everyone.

Communication is a basic human right.

Reasons we See Behaviors

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Frustration | ☐ Inconsistent access |
| ☐ Sensory regulation | ☐ They do not understand the "why" yet |
| ☐ Sensory overload from the device | ☐ We are not listening |
| ☐ Standing out | ☐ Poor rapport or relationship difficulties |
| ☐ Inappropriate language system | ☐ iPad obsession |

What NOT to do!

- ☐ Once we know the problem, we can come up with better possible solutions
- ☐ The correct solution is NEVER to:

Remove or deny access to the device

Turn off the volume

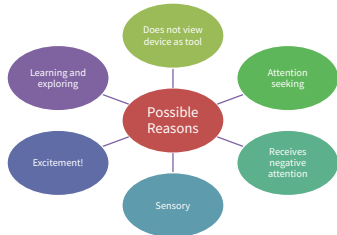
Decide the child cannot use a device

Behavior #1: Repeated tapping

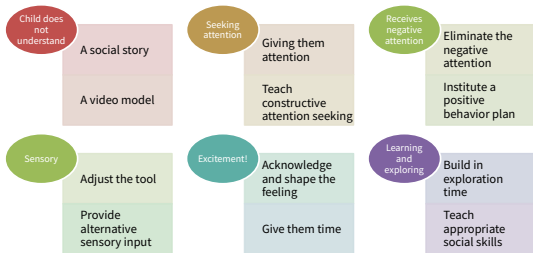


"My student repeatedly taps the screen. Over and over again. It is driving everyone crazy and is disruptive to the class. I think they are stimming on it. Or maybe they just see it as a toy."

Behavior #1: Repeated tapping



Behavior #1: Repeated tapping



Behavior #2: No visual attention

"My student never looks at the device when it is near her. She is not paying attention to it at all."



Behavior #2: No visual attention

- ❑ Children do not need to be looking at their device to be learning it!
 - ❑ Solution: model, model, model, model, model
 - ❑ Did I say model?
- ❑ Vision assessment (acuity AND functional vision, depending on diagnosis and medical/birth history)
- ❑ Wait time

Behavior #2: No visual attention

- ❑ Access features on the device (padding, black background, highlighting words, modifying background colors, etc.)
- ❑ Positive behavior reinforcement for looking at/toward the device
- ❑ Consider positioning

Behavior #3: They won't touch it



"My student deliberately avoids it. Will not touch it at all. I carry it everywhere for them. They look at it when I model, but they do not seem to like it or want to touch it or use it themselves."

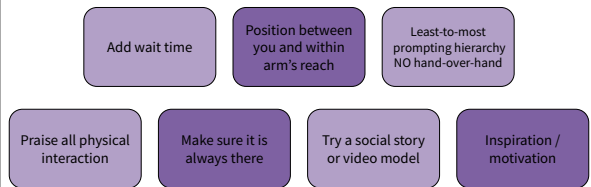
Behavior #3: They won't touch it



ASK YOURSELF:

- ❑ Have you (inadvertently) sent the message that it is for you to touch, not them?
- ❑ Are you batting their hand away when they try to touch it while you are modeling?
- ❑ Is it with them all of the time?
- ❑ Were they "over touching" it before and an effort was made to extinguish that behavior?
- ❑ Are you using a most-to-least prompting hierarchy (especially hand-over-hand)?
- ❑ Is it within arm's reach all of the time?

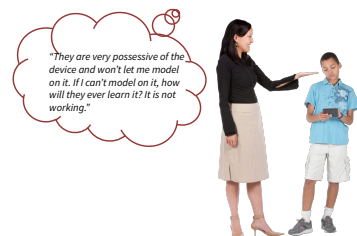
Behavior #3: They won't touch it



AAC Prompting Hierarchy

1	Expectant Pause	Give the child time to respond or the opportunity to initiate communication.
2	Indirect Nonverbal Prompt	Use your body language to indicate to the child that something is expected (e.g. expectant facial expression, questioning hand motion with a string, etc.).
3	Indirect Verbal Prompt	Use an open-ended question that tells the child that something is expected but nothing too specific (e.g. "Now what?", "What should we do next?").
4	Request a Response	If there is still no response, you can try to direct the child more specifically (e.g. "Tell me what you want." "You need to ask me").
5	Gestural Cue	You can point to the symbol or leave/stop your finger there for several seconds to get the child started with his message.
6	Partial Verbal Prompt	If there is still no response, give them part of the expected response (e.g. "You went to the...").
7	Direct Model	If still no response, model on the student's device (e.g. "The bear is sad"). Pause and wait for the child to initiate or respond.
8	Hand-over-hand	If still no response, use hand-over-hand to guide the child's hand to the device.

Behavior #4: But they won't let me touch it!



Behavior #4: But they won't let me touch it!

Consider this:

They have something they can (finally?) control!
It is their voice and they are worried it will be taken
They see it as an extension of themselves
It can be a GOOD thing!

Try this:

Ask permission to touch it
Offer a social story or video model
Print and laminate low-tech paper versions of their home page
Have a second / classroom iPad to model on
Give them time

Additional things to consider

- ❑ Motivation
- ❑ Overall regulation
- ❑ Access and physical limitations
- ❑ Hearing and vision
- ❑ Use their strengths
- ❑ Too little (or too customized) vocabulary

Additional things to consider

**A CHILD SHOULD NEVER
HAVE TO PROVE THEMSELVES TO GET
ACCESS TO WORDS**

**ALL children need and deserve access to a
robust vocabulary**

No child

should have to prove
anything to get the chance
to communicate.

Every voice matters.



**There are no
prerequisites for AAC use**

Additional things to consider

- ❑ Practice and model when not escalated / heightened
 - ❑ Do not expect someone to be able to communicate when exhibiting behaviors or having an emotional response
- ❑ Do not use the device as a drill/testing tool
- ❑ Treat the child as you would a verbal child
- ❑ Consider all pragmatic functions
 - ❑ Do they have access to communicate all functions?
 - ❑ Are they “stuck” in requesting wants and needs? And if so, is that our fault?

The Danger

If we...

Presume a child needs to start small	Do not consider motivations	Do not honor the non-speaking and other forms of communication	Do not give them access to as many words as possible	Do not give them access to learning literacy
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Then...

Your job will be harder, progress will be slower,
and you will see negative behaviors!

The “Overlooked” Population

Part time AAC users

- ❑ [Talking with Tech episode](#) with Alyssa Hillary Zisk
- ❑ Make sure part-time AAC users have consistent access to various forms of communication
- ❑ Be sure we identify part-time AAC users and who would benefit
- ❑ Ensure that part time users *always* have access to their devices so that they have them when they need them!

Major Take-Aways

- ❑ All children can use AAC in some form. If you are seeing behaviors, we need to figure out why and presume it is the system or the environment, not the person's ability to use AAC.
- ❑ Presume potential, always
- ❑ Establish rapport and identify motivators
- ❑ Communication is a basic right
- ❑ Treat the communication device as an extension of the person / their voice. Never, ever remove it from them.
- ❑ Treat behaviors as behaviors – just as you would a child who is verbal

Resources

- ❑ [Temple University - short video on communication as a basic human right](#)
- ❑ [PrAACtical AAC](#) – blog about what to do for children who repeat themselves or repeat tap on their AAC
- ❑ [AAC Assessment links and ideas](#)
- ❑ [Talking With Tech AAC podcast](#)

References

Mirenda, P. & Brown, K. 2007. *Supporting Individuals with Autism and Problem Behavior Using AAC*. (16, 2). *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*. 26-31.

Prompting Hierarchy (Senner, 2010; YAACK, 1999) adapted from Positive AACtion Information Kit for AAC Teams.
Retrieved from:
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Thank you!

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