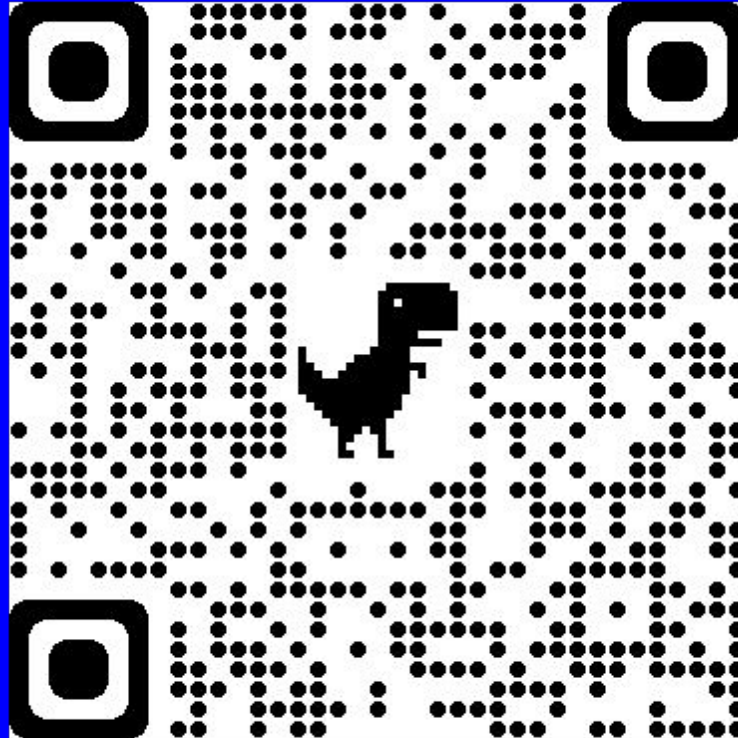


***Beyond Words: Empowering  
Students with Autism Through  
AAC and Communication  
Strategies!***

**By Mo Buti**

# Stay Connected!!



# Mo Buti



With over 35 years of experience, Mo is a practiced professional in the field of special education providing services and support to those with disabilities and their families and schools. She managed autism programs and services for over 6,000 students as Director of Autism and Intellectual Disabilities at Chicago Public Schools. Mo's additional experience also includes special education teacher, autism itinerant and special education administrator.

Owner of AiepA: Advocate and Instructional Expert for People with Autism.

# Today we will.....

- Participants will be able to describe at least 5 myths about AAC and what makes them wrong.
- Participants will be able to explain what aided language stimulation is and why it is important.
- Participants will be able to describe the difference between core vocabulary and fringe vocabulary and how to decide what words to use.
- And much much more!

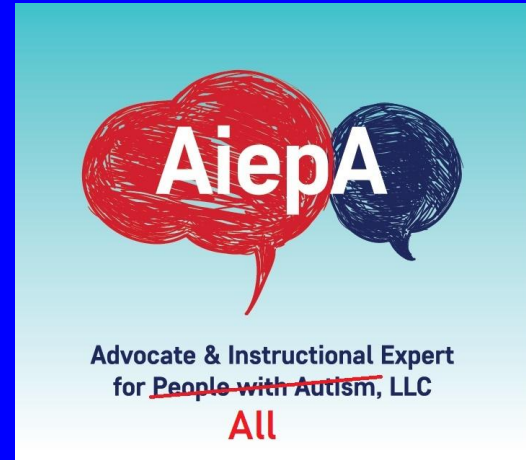
# Disclosures: Mo Buti

## Financial Disclosures

Mo Buti is the owner of AiepA and receives financial compensation at times for presenting. This presentation is receiving financial compensation.

## Non-Financial Disclosures

Mo Buti is a Governor appointed member of the Illinois Autism Task force.



# Why are we looking at Autism and AAC use?

According to the CDC, 1 in 36 children is diagnosed with a disorder on the Autism spectrum.

One of the characteristics of those with autism includes: A developmental disability that significantly affects **verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction.**

# Let's look at the characteristics of Autism before we look at barriers. They are connected.

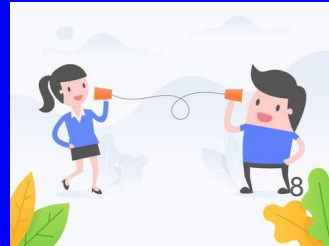
- A developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal *communication* and *social interaction*.
- Involves engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements.
- Demonstrates resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines.
- Demonstrates unusual responses to sensory experiences.



# Communication:

Communication is vital to every aspect of our lives.

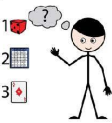
- Receptive language skills: involve the ability to understand verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Expressive language skills: involve the ability to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas through verbal or nonverbal communication.



# Communication Bill of Rights

All people with a disability of any extent or severity have a basic right to affect, through communication, the conditions of their existence. Beyond this general right, a number of specific communication rights should be ensured in all daily interactions and interventions involving persons who have severe disabilities.






To be given real choices



To say no, refuse & reject choices



To ask for what I want



To share my feelings



To be heard & responded to (even if the answer is no)



To have and use my speech system all the time

# Communication

# Bill of Rights


I have the right:




To ask for and get attention & interaction




To ask & know about my schedule & world



To be taught how to communicate



To have my speech system in working order & to have an alternate



To be a full & equal member of my community



To be treated with respect & dignity



To be spoken with, not about



To be communicated with in a sensitive manner

These rights are summarized from the Communication Bill of Rights put forth in 1992 by the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities.

# **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)**

**A term referring to all communication other than natural speech. These are communication methods that supplement and substitute the natural speech and language of individuals. These are a way to express their feelings, opinions, needs and wants.**

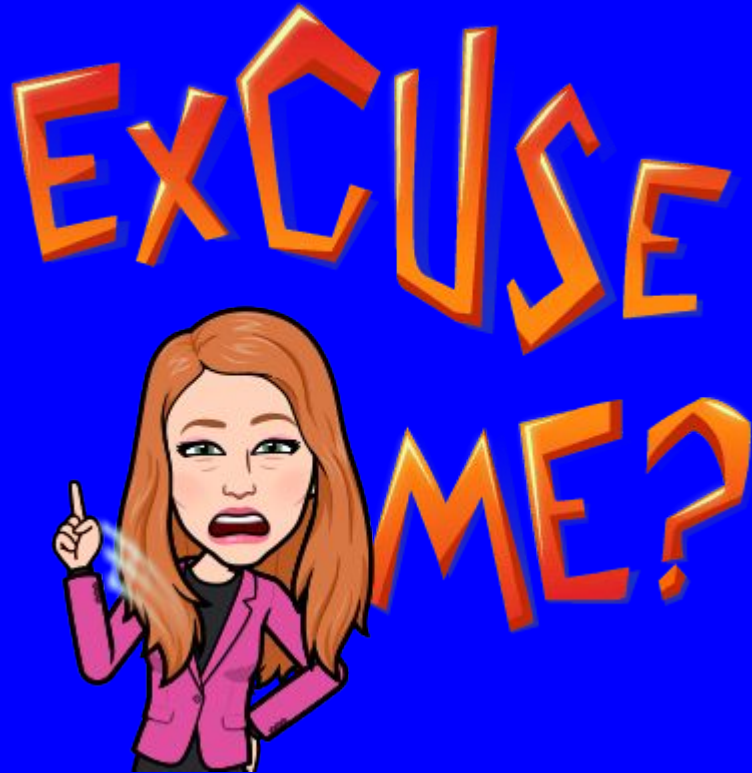
# SIGNS THAT A CHILD NEEDS AAC

1. Completely non-speaking
2. Speech is hard to understand
3. Vocabulary of less than 50 words
4. High level of scripted phrases
5. Communication breakdowns.



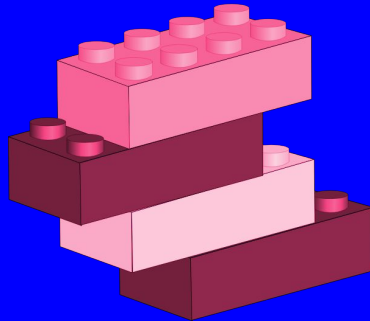
Foster meaningful  
connections **and** enhance  
learning outcomes.

**“He/She is not a candidate for ACC!”**

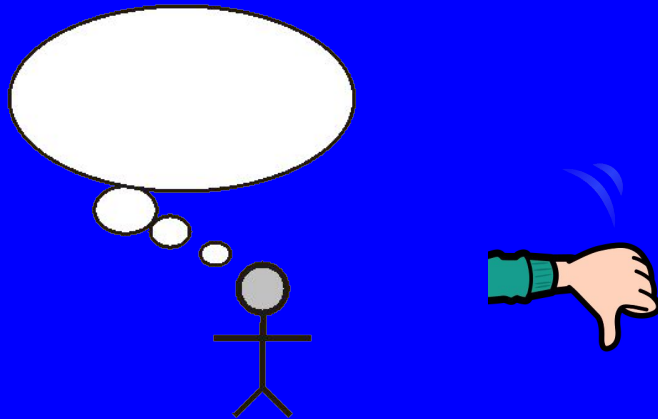




**There are no prerequisite skills for AAC!!!!**



**There are many myths about AAC prerequisites.**



# #1 “You must understand cause and effect” .....nope!

“Cause and effect is the basis for communication. If a child does not understand that then maybe they will not attempt to communicate”

That is simply not true

ACTUALLY- AAC teaches cause and effect

AND

communication.



## #2 “You must understand that a picture represents an object or word”.....nope!

That is simply not true.

**AAC teaches this!**

You also do not have to be able to match or identify pictures.

**AAC teaches this!**

REMINDER: We are no longer symbolating all text!!!



**#3 “You must understand a certain amount of language first to use AAC”.....nope!**

**That is simply not true!**

**There is no rule that says you have to have great language skills before they can start communicating!**

**AAC teaches language**

**You do not wait to talk to a baby before they understand language right?**





Just like a  
baby is not  
born saying  
words, using  
language and  
saying  
sentences.....

We do not stop....after 1 week? After 2 weeks? After 6 months?



<https://www.tiktok.com/@neek.1126/video/7169021195793255723>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOfEu2zgrkQ>

**#4 “You must have good enough motor skills to use AAC”  
.....nope!**

**That is simply not true!**

**There are SO many different options for  
accessing AAC (finger point direct select,  
scanning, switches, toes, knee, elbow, head  
pointer, light pointer, eye gaze, key guards,etc)**



## #5 “You must have an interest to communicate to use AAC” .....nope!

**That is simply not true!**

How can you have interest in something you do not know of?

The child may never have experienced the power of functional meaningful communication.

But if they have any behaviors then they ARE already communicating.



## #6 “You must be completely non-speaking to use AAC” .....nope!

That is simply not true!

Some students may have verbal speech that is hard to understand.

Some students have communication breakdowns where they struggle with word retrieval. (high anxiety)

Some might not have enough verbal speech. “They have words” (10 words)



# SIGNS THAT A CHILD NEEDS AAC

Remember what we said earlier:

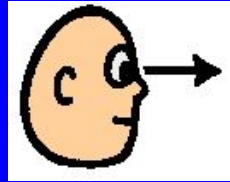
1. Completely non-speaking
2. Speech is hard to understand
3. Vocabulary of less than 50 words
4. High level of scripted phrases
5. Communication breakdowns.



# Why We Communicate?

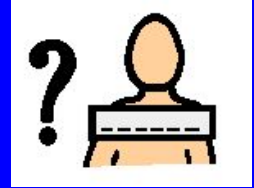


Getting  
attention



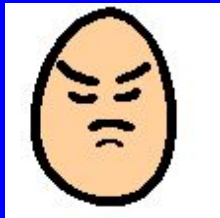
Commenting

Seeking  
Info

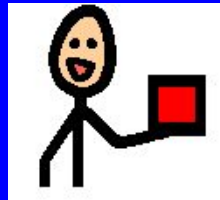


Requesting

Social  
Routine



Protesting



Giving  
Information

Other



# Let's do an activity

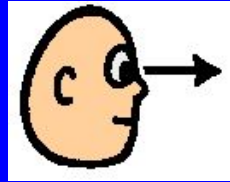
- Write 10 words on a piece of paper.
- Don't tell anyone what your words are.



# Why We Communicate?

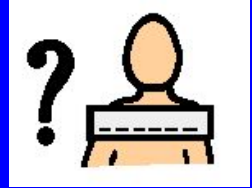


Getting  
attention



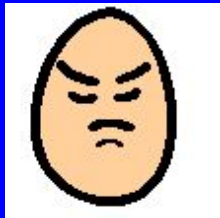
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Seeking  
Info

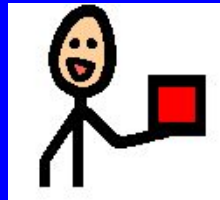


Requesting

Social  
Routine



Protesting



Giving  
Information

Other



# Vocal stimming is a repetitive vocal behavior that can.....

- serve as a coping mechanism.
- be used to self-regulate emotions.
- be triggered by various stimuli, such as stress, anxiety, excitement, or boredom.
  - include humming, grunting, moaning, or repeating words or phrases.
- be used to express needs
- be a form of communication
- help with anxiety



Can those same reasons for  
vocal stimming be demonstrated  
with AAC?

And would we respond the same  
way we would if it were spoken  
language?





Wr



e TV

v

Wr

e TV

He was very upset because he wanted an IPAD and it was not his turn. The teacher stated “We can not give him his AAC when he is upset because he cannot even focus on it because he is so dysregulated”

I said, “Let’s give it a try”

**My, my, my, my, my, good-bye, good-bye, good-bye**

Teacher “See he is just playing with the device. He is stimming on it”

Me: Nope sounds about right. He wants the IPAD - “my” and he wants you to get out of his face “good-bye”

# Possible Responses

## Try This:

Redirection

Incorporate the favorite topic

Model a variety of  
vocabulary

Respond

## Avoid This:

Hiding the topic

Using hand over hand to  
force a topic

Turning off device

Taking device away

# Every response teaches something

Always provide an authentic response to anything an AAC user says with their device.

- No response= Your voice is not valued
- “We are not talking about that now” = dismissing what the student is talking about...and if they are literal they are thinking, “but I am talking about that now”

Options can be:

- “You like dinosaurs” = teaching that the student is heard
- “Right now the class is learning about the solar system.”
- What planet do you think Dinosaurs would like to live on? (incorporation of a special interest)
- First we will talk about solar systems and then we can talk about dinosaurs (delayed gratification)

## **#7 “You will never use spoken speech if you use AAC” .....nope!**

**That is simply not true!**

**The research shows that those using AAC increase the chances of a child using verbal communication.**

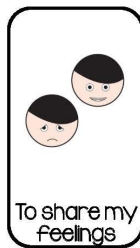
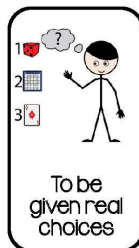
**The research shows that those using AAC increase their verbal utterances.**



## LOOK HOW LONG THIS RESEARCH HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR:

- **Romski & Sevcik (1996): AAC may let individuals with speech impairments to bypass the cognitive and motor demands of speech production and focus on communication instead. Once they establish basic communication and language abilities, they may be able to use their developed resources to improve their speech production.**
- Sedey, Rosin, and Miller (1991) showed that manual signs taught to 80% of the 46 young children with Down Syndrome. The parents of these children reported that the children stopped using manual signs when they began to talk or when the child's speech improved.
- Adamnson and Dunbar (1991) showed that a 2-year old girl immediately attempted to speak after having a trach tube removed, and used speech as her primary mode of communication rather than manual signs.
- Overall, research suggests that speaking is easier than AAC, so individuals will try to use speech as their mode of communication whenever possible
- Millar, Light & Schlosser (2006): 89% of participants showed an increase in speech production while the other 11% of participants showed no change in speech production

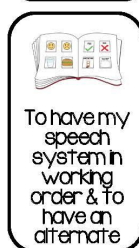
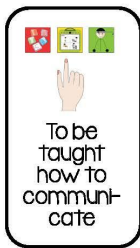
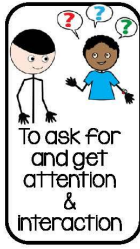
In a comprehensive literature search, Millar, Light, and Schlosser (2006) reviewed 23 studies that included data on speech production and AAC intervention. The results indicated that AAC interventions have a *positive* impact on speech production among all ages and across a variety of AAC intervention approaches. Of the participants reviewed, 94% demonstrated an *increase* in speech production. More research to support that AAC can actually *increase* the development and use of verbal language and language learning for users.



# Communication

# Bill of Rights

I have the right:



These rights are summarized from the Communication Bill of Rights put forth in 1992 by the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities.

**#8** “Students who do not use verbal speaking to communicate are not able to be successful in the general education classroom.” .....nope!

**That is simply not true!**

People tend to overestimate the ability of our verbal speaking learners and underestimate the ability of our non-speaking (non-verbal) learners.



# Verbal/Speaking vs Non-Verbal/Non-Speaking

- Being verbal does not determine how one functions intellectually.
- You can be highly intellectual and yet not use words verbally.
- You can use words verbally however they may not be used to communicate accurately or effectively.

# Presume competence !!!!!

Presuming competence is the belief that everyone can learn, think, and understand, regardless of diagnosis.

## HIGH EXPECTATIONS!

**#9** “A speech therapist teaches the student to use a AAC device during speech therapy sessions.” .....nope!

**That is simply not true!**

Learning to use AAC is done through Aided Language Stimulation. This is the process of modeling Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) language in everyday settings. The communication partner talks to the person while also pointing/selecting keywords on the person's AAC system

# **Aided language stimulation is.....**

**A research-based strategy....yeah yeah yeah!**

**“Does the school have evidence the programs they are advocating for my child are based on solid scientific research or have been validated through review by the State or federal Department of Education?”**



# AIDED LANGUAGE STIMULATION

When a baby learns to talk we model language for them.....so when we are expecting a person with autism to utilize a alternate communication system then we need to model it for them. In other words.....we use their system when talking to them.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cs3kp0Dr8a-/>



Dad modeled  
language using  
Josie's device every  
chance he could!

We



# It is all about modeling

**Show Show Show**  
**Do Do Do**



# Training!!!!

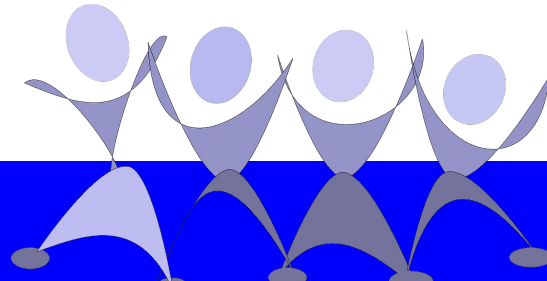
**“You can not learn a language by someone who does not know the language”**

**You would not learn how to speak Japanese by someone who does not know how to speak Japanese.**

# **Who should model language?**

## **EVERYONE!**

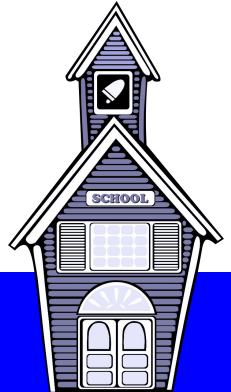
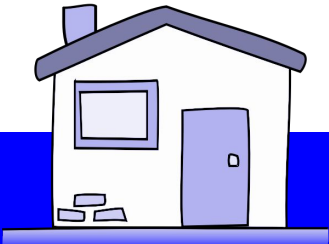
**Parents, teachers, paras,  
therapists, peers.**



**Where should language be modeled?**

**EVERYWHERE!**

**Classroom, home, recess,  
lunch, etc.**



# How often should we model?

## As much as you can!



**What language should be modeled?**

**Model words and language that is one step above the AAC learner's current skills level.**

**For users that are able to use 1-2 word combinations, modeling 3-6 word sentences For users that are producing 3-6 word sentences, modeling longer sentences, ideas and grammar would be appropriate.**

**Don't freak out.....**



**You can start with low tech (but not a prerequisite).**

**You can start slowly.**

**You can make mistakes.**

**You can start small.....pick 1 activity a day and increase every day as you become more comfortable.**

**What language should be modeled?**

**Focus on key words  
when modeling.**

# What language should be modeled?

- Gradually increase the number of words selected as the individual's capabilities grow, e.g. "want," "want more," "I want more."
- Model pointing to symbols according to the individual's pace.
- Provide enough time for the user to understand the word, word order and sentence structure.

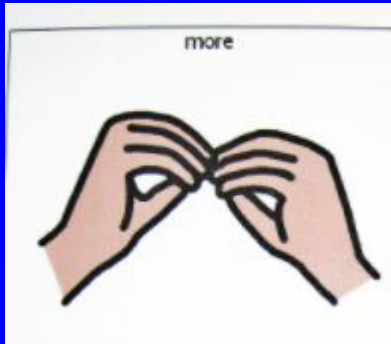
# Is this appropriate?



Crackers



Bathroom



**How many times  
in one day can  
you model these  
words?**

**This is too  
limiting!**

Think how quickly your students have learned other symbols without being explicitly taught....



**TARGET**

# Start with ...

**Talking about things that are:**

- **Interesting to the child**
- **Motivating to the child**
- **Useful to the child**
- **Authentic**
- **Social**
- **Connections**

Foster meaningful  
connections **and** enhance  
learning outcomes.

## **Brenda DelMonte says.....**

Successful communication requires a human connection!

Learn something about the student you did not know.

Include emotion, humor, and curiosity.

# Labeling emotions.....

Think about this....asking any student, “How are you feeling today?”

Nobody ever says “Happy”

And if it is you want them to say, “angry”, well guess what - they already are saying that with their behaviors.

And you can not actually know how a person is feeling.

# Lack of social skills

The goal of AAC is not to change the child's personality

Model social language

Create social opportunities

Accept what they do or do not give you



She already talks in scripts.



# Scripts.....

“ladies and gentleman”

“to infinity and beyond”

“nailed it” “rrrr wrong answer”

communication  
placeholders



# Scripted language

- Scripting often serves a purpose for the student, such as self-soothing, communication, or processing information (“ladies and gentleman”- placeholder)
- Rather than stopping scripting entirely, try to channel it into more functional communication or social interaction.
- If scripts are based on favorite topics or characters, use these interests to teach new skills or concepts.
- Respond

# Echolalia

Identify the type and function:

- Immediate echolalia: repeating words right after hearing them
- Delayed echolalia: repeating words or phrases heard in the past
- Functions can include: requesting, protesting, affirming, self-regulation, or processing language

Respond meaningfully:

- If the student echoes a question, answer it as if they asked it intentionally
- This can help them understand the communicative purpose of questions

Allow time to process: Can be used as a placeholder while processing

Provide choices:

- Offer verbal or visual choices to encourage intentional communication

# When verbal, imitating digitized speech

- **Communication is communication**
- **Voices are always getting better**
- **Add some recorded speech buttons**
- **Have user pick the voice the AAC device uses**

**Tech solution through Apple = Personal Voice**

# AAC does not promote eye contact

Look and act like a listener

Eye contact is not required to communicate

Eye contact can create shutdown

Provide learning materials they can look at so they are learning through vision not taxing their vision

Requiring eye contact could increase the anxiety to the point where they can't listen

Teaching “look and act like a listener”



Presume Receptive Competency!

Presume Expressive Potential!

Don't be afraid to fail –  
trying is success!



# response



Ask the individual a follow-up open ended questions to keep the process going.

# respond

Do not reward “talking” .....just RESPOND!

**Respect and respond**



# Think About How You Talk to Your AAC Learner

If you want it,  
tell me in a  
sentence.

Good  
talking

Tell me with  
your talker.

That's using  
your device.

Oh, you're just  
playing with  
[stimming on]  
that device.

**#10 “When starting to use AAC, you should start with choice making.” .....nope!**

**That is simply not true!**

**Choice making is a form of communication, but is not the ONLY form of communication. Core AND fringe vocabulary are both important to learn.**

# Core vs Fringe Vocabulary

Core	Fringe
Most commonly/frequently used words	Specific to a topic, environment, or individual
More generic	Make up 20-25% of what we say
Can be used across wide range of environments and partners	
Make up 70-90% of what we say	

CORE  
VS







FRINGE VOCABULARY

How many phrases can you make using  
just these words?

Actor	Belgium	Gold	Insurance	Painting	Restaurant
Advertisement	Boy	Grass	Iron	Parrot	River
Afternoon	Branch	Greece	Island	Pencil	Rocket
Airport	Breakfast	Guitar	Jackal	Piano	Room
Ambulance	Brother	Hair	Jelly	Pillow	Rose
Animal	Camera	Hamburger	Jewellery	Pizza	Russia
Answer	Candle	Helicopter	Jordan	Planet	Sandwich
Apple	Car	Helmet	Juice	Plastic	School
Army	Caravan	Holiday	Kangaroo	Portugal	Scooter
Australia	Carpet	Honey	King	Potato	Shampoo
Balloon	Cartoon	Horse	Kitchen	Queen	Shoe
Banana	China	Hospital	Kite	Quill	Soccer
Battery	Church	House	Knife	Rain	Spoon
Beach	Crayon	Hydrogen	Lamp	Rainbow	Stone
Beard	Crowd	Ice	Lawyer	Raincoat	Sugar
Bed	Daughter	Insect	Leather	Refrigerator	Sweden

# CORE VS FRINGE VOCABULARY

How many phrases can you make using just these words?

what 	when 	where 	ABC 123	PEOPLE 	QUESTN 	ACTIONS 	SOCIAL 	PLACES 	TIME 	GROUPS 	DESCRIB 
I	me 	how 	who 	why 	again 	please 	thank you 	problem 	now 	bad 	good 
my/mine 	am	to	be	feel 	give 	listen 	happy 	sad 	tired 	okay 	cool 
it 	is are	will	come 	hurt 	hear 	know 	that 	a	the	and 	more 
you 	can	eat 	drink 	finish 	get 	love 	make 	need 	all 	at	some 
your 	do	go 	help 	open 	put 	say/talk 	see/look 	first 	then 	for of	on 
here 	have 	like 	play 	read 	stop 	walk 	show 	wait min 	in 	up 	off 
yes 	no/don't 	want 	take 	tell 	turn 	watch 	wear 	work 	out 	down 	with

## QUICK FACTS ABOUT LANGUAGE

Typical Language	Language of People Who Use AAC
<b>4000-6000:</b> number of words typically developing child hears per day	How many words do you model on the device each day?
<b>500:</b> number of times a child hears those first words before he/she says it	<b>50-150:</b> number of times a word was modeled before the child started using independently
<b>1 year:</b> how long we immerse in language before we expect to hear a word.	<b>Immediately:</b> how long before we often expect the child to use the device independently
<b>36,500:</b> the number of <b>HOURS</b> typical 9-12 year old has been exposed to and immersed in oral language (Korsten, 2011)	<b>701:</b> Number of <b>YEARS</b> , at twice a week, for 20-30 minutes, that it would take for a child to obtain the same amount of language immersion on his/her device, as the 9-12 year olds (Korsten, 2011)

<https://saltillo.com/>

# **Practice Makes Perfect.....**

**Practice with the device or system.**

**Get to know where the symbols are.**

Kelly Bober Key  
Deidre Renee





# Real-life



- **Do not be afraid to be imperfect.**
- **Communication is not always perfect.**
- **Model to student what to do when things go wrong.**
- **Talk about what you are doing in order to locate the message you want.**

# Challenges of Aided language

- **It is a new form of communication.**
- **Learning the device or system.**
- **Locating words and composing messages.**
- **You might have multiple systems in your classroom at the same time.**

# Video record

Video record yourself doing aided language stimulation and then watch yourself and the AAC user. See what worked, what did not and what might need to be done differently.



# Pause and wait time

Silences can be uncomfortable, but are definitely worth it when supporting children who use AAC!

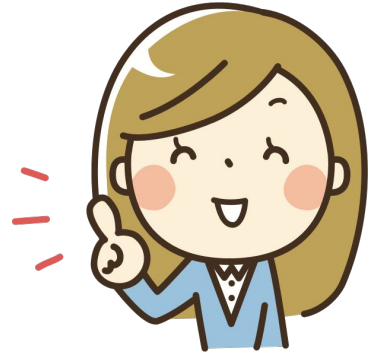


# Responses/selections by the user

**Respond!**

**Respond!**

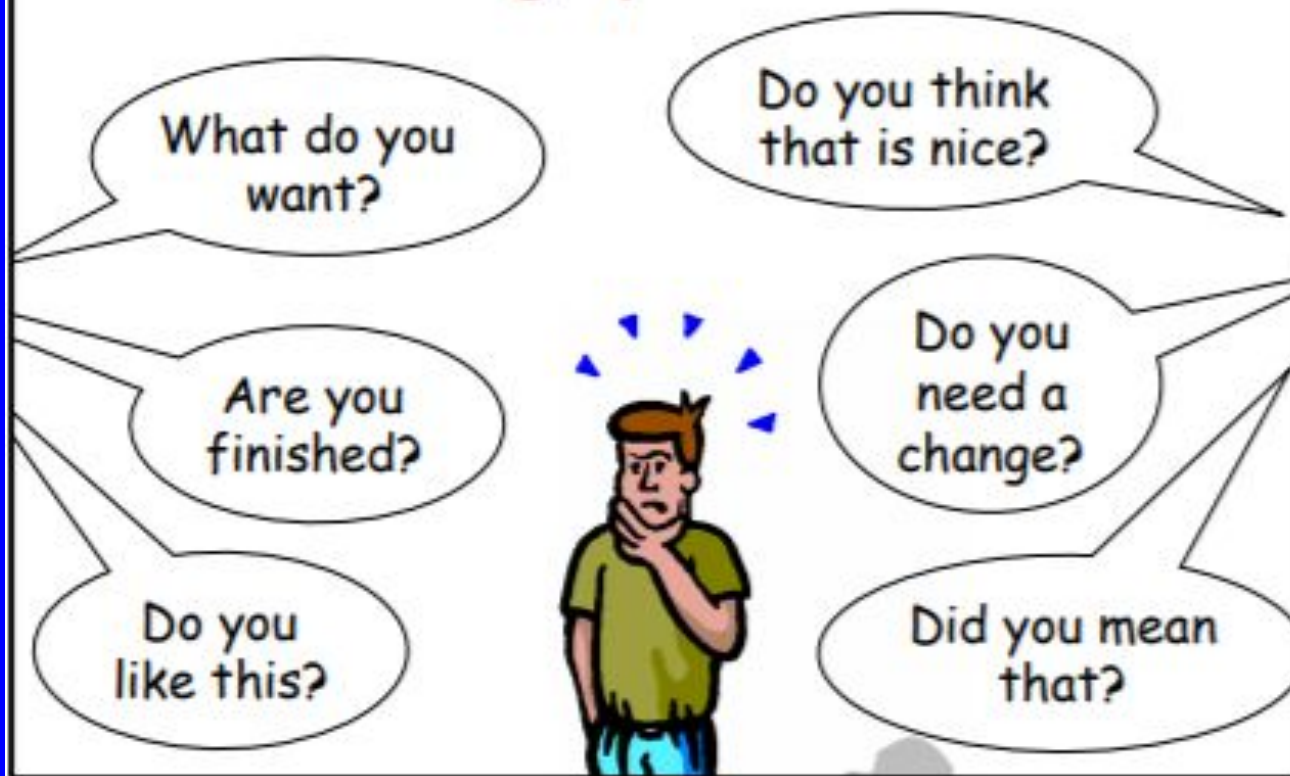
**Respond!**



# Responses/selections by the user

- No matter what is selected.
- Provide natural response/consequences.
- Validate communication.
- Expand on response.

# Modeling is Talking not just asking questions



Also,  
not  
labeling  
nouns  
either.

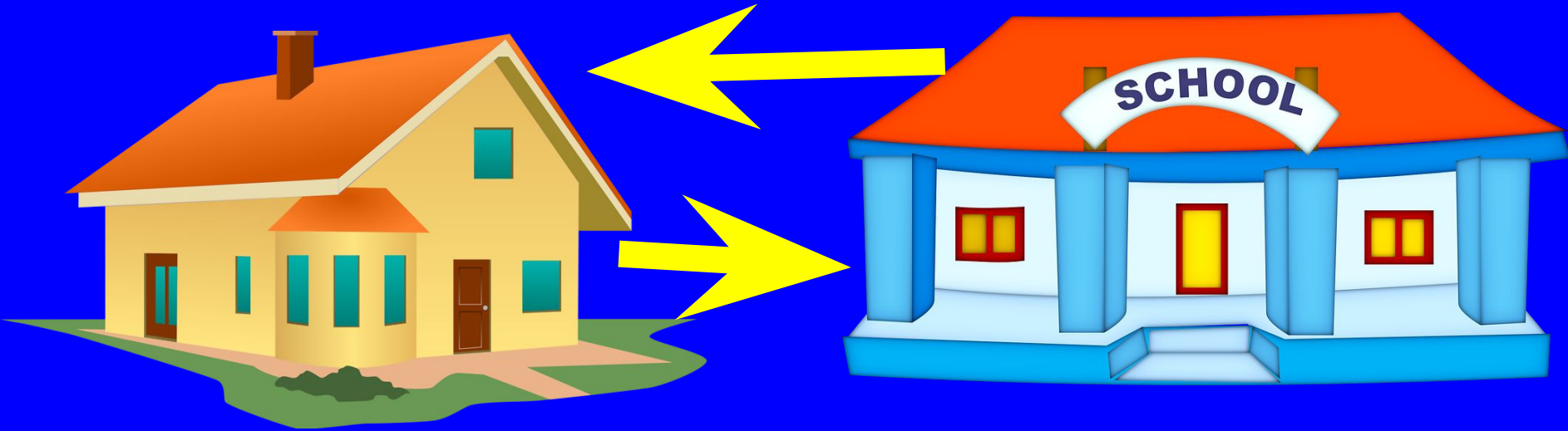
Linda J. Burkhart

# Communication Throughout the Day

**In order for communication to be “functional” it needs to occur throughout the day..... at different times, with different people, in different environments, and for different purposes.**



# Utilize the same systems



# When student's communication is not understood.....

- Behavior
- Anxiety
- Shut down
- Depression
- Frustration
- Lack of social interactions
- Inability to “show what they know”





**Thank you!**



**Please stay in touch!**

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