

AAC Intervention: For Beginning Communicators



Beginning Communicators

- Beginning Communicator
 - Relies primarily on non-symbolic modes of communication (gestures, facial expression, body language, etc.)
 - Just learning to use aided/unaided symbols to represent basic messages
 - Uses simple low-tech/high-tech AAC systems for participation and early communication



Beginning Communicators

- Represent a range of individuals
 - Young children with various diagnoses
 - Children, adolescents or adults with developmental disabilities
 - Individuals in early stage of recovery from an acquired disability/disorder



Communication and Behavior

- Relationship between communication and problem behavior
 - Many problem behaviors can be interpreted as communication
 - People communicate in the most efficient and effective way possible – the is often behavioral



Intervention: Young Children

- Intervention for young children should:
 - Start early
 - Focus on increasing meaningful participation through
 - Creating predictable routines
 - Adapting play routines



Intervention: School-Aged Children

- Intervention for school-aged individuals should:
 - Be person-centered/person-specific
 - Addressed as a shared vision statement (i.e., part of an IEP)
 - Critically important that educational plans are designed around the individual's needs rather than what is existing within the educational institution
- Emphasize social networks
 - PATH (Planning Alternative Transitions with Hope) = 8-step program designed to bring together an individual with CCN and his or her social network – *O'Brien & Pearpoint, 2007*
 - Social Networks = focuses on identifying communication partners across 5 "circles" – life partners, relatives & close friends, neighbors & acquaintances, staff, unfamiliar partners – *Blackstone & Hunt Berg, 2003*



Intervention: Adolescents and Adults

- Intervention for adolescents & adults should:
 - Focus on the community
 - To address the quantity and quality of participation and communication within an individual's community
 - Requires a careful analysis of one's setting
 - Incorporate an "ecological inventory" – Reickie, York, & Sigafos, 2012
 - Observe a typical peer engaging in an activity
 - Detail the steps involved
 - Determine the skills needed and what the individual with CCN is or isn't able to do
 - Design communication supports to teach the skills that are needed



Intervention: Communication Partners

- Facilitator and communication partners are essential. They need to know:
 - How to identify and respond to non-symbolic communication
 - Understand that behavior has a purpose and consider the communicative meaning of a specific behavior
 - How their reaction can exacerbate or prevent the development of problem behaviors
 - How to clearly distinguish signals for communication and how to respond accordingly



Intervention: Goals and Starting Points

- Communication intervention goals for beginning communicators typically address:
 - Getting attention
 - Accepting
 - Rejecting

For beginning communicators, these are often socially unacceptable behaviors – strategies such as Functional Communication Training can help teach appropriate ways to get attention, accept and reject
- Intervention strategies include:
 - Scripted routines
 - Gesture dictionaries
 - Visual Schedules
 - Switches for communication/participation

Require Joint Attention



Intervention: Language

- Language is composed of:
 - Phonology:
 - speech sounds – critical for literacy development
 - Semantics:
 - understanding of words and how they relate to one another
 - Syntax:
 - Rules that govern word order
 - Morphology:
 - Rules for building and changing words for different meanings
 - Pragmatics
 - Communicative functions of language



Intervention: Language Learning

- Supporting language learning and development for individuals using AAC requires one to:
 - Translate language into visual form
 - Organize the representation of language using either:
 - Grid displays
 - Semantic-Syntactic: organizes vocabulary by parts of speech
 - Taxonomic: Subordinate category grouping
 - Activity: organization according to events, routines, etc.
 - Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display (PODD): combination of displays to support pragmatic language
 - Visual Scene Displays: scenes associated with specific activities
 - Hybrid Displays
 - Creating message units
 - One symbol = paragraph or word or morpheme or letter



Intervention: Instructional Approaches

- Instructional Approaches:
 - Explicit Instruction
 - Incidental Teaching
 - Conversational Coaching:
 - Facilitator provides a range of prompting techniques designed to support conversation
 - Strategy Instruction (p. 272):
 - Systematic approach that 1) defines a goal; 2) explains it; 3) demonstrates it; 4) establishes a context; 5) practices it; 6) offers feedback; 7) evaluates progress; 8) generalizes it...
 - Language Modeling
 - Aided Language Stimulation (ALiS; Gossens et al., 1992)
 - System for Augmenting Language (SAL; Romski & Sevik, 2009)
 - Aided Language Modeling (ALM; Drager et al., 2006)



Intervention: Supporting Linguistic and Social Competence

Support the development of:

- Semantics
- Syntax
- Grammar
- Pragmatics:
 - Choice-making
 - Requesting
 - Rejecting
 - Yes/No
 - Social Interactions
 - Initiation
 - Questions
 - Comments
 - Conversational repairs, etc.

• Can be addressed/taught using explicit instruction and/or using language modeling.
• Often need to use both strategies
• Intervention should be functional whenever possible

• Are taught using a range of strategies
• Strategy is contingent upon learner's goals and abilities
• Age-appropriateness needs to be considered
• Generalization is key
• Important to identify associated problem behaviors
• Make intervention functional



Intervention: AAC and Literacy

- Literacy skills are essential; they support:
 - Cognitive development
 - Social relationships
 - Access to a range of technologies & leisure activities
- For individuals with CCN, literacy skills:
 - Expand communication options & elevates expectations
 - Provide visual supports for language learning
 - Enhance perceptions of competence & elevates self-esteem
- Literacy skills are progressive
 - Emergent skills → Early literacy conventions → Advanced Skills
- Interventions involves 5 key components:
 - Providing sufficient time
 - Targeting appropriate skills
 - Using effective & proven techniques
 - Provide necessary instructional adaptations
 - Build positive rapport & make it motivating!



Intervention: Inclusion and Implementation

- Inclusive education = practices and outcomes that take place primarily in a general education classroom
- Access to the general education curriculum is mandated by No Child Left Behind – goals related to general education content standards as well as functional skills are detailed in a student's IEP
- Transition planning (E.I. to graduation) should start early
- Plan for classroom-wide accommodations
 - Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- Identify individualized accommodations as needed


