



ENRICHING THE COMMUNITY

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What is Augmentative and Alternative Communication?

Augmentative and alternative communication, also known as AAC, is a term that is used to describe various methods of communication that can help people who are unable to use verbal speech to communicate. AAC can benefit a wide range of individuals, from a beginning communicator to a more sophisticated communicator who generates his own messages.

AAC includes both unaided and aided systems. Unaided systems, like signing and gestures, do not require special materials or equipment. Aided systems use picture charts, books and special computers. AAC methods vary and may be personalized to meet each individual's needs. Many forms of AAC include an assistive technology component which range from high- to low-tech strategies.

Any person with a disability that makes it difficult for them to communicate may benefit from AAC. Some people need AAC only for a short time; others may use it throughout their lives. AAC allows an individual to express their needs and wants, and more fully participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems (e.g., communication books of line drawings, computer-based voice output systems) offer children with severe communication disabilities increased opportunities for participation in home, school, and community activities. However, without the appropriate vocabulary, AAC systems will not be effective. Language samples from five typically developing preschool children were analyzed to determine the words used and the content of the preschoolers' language. Results indicated that a large portion of the words used by the participants was accounted for by a relatively limited number of words. Using these data and data from other studies in the field, a vocabulary selection questionnaire for professionals and parents was developed and field-tested. A total of 45 speech language pathologists, teachers, and parents indicated a high level of satisfaction, with 93% of informants reporting that they would use the tool again and 98% of informants indicating that they would recommend it to other parents and professionals. Results from both studies are presented and discussed with reference to clinical implications and future research directions.

If you are interested in learning more about augmentative and alternative communication, contact Katherine Botash at 607-723-8313 ext: 319.