



Week 19: AAC Outside the Family



AAcTion Steps

StepInAAC.org/A-Week19 (Online / PDF)

Core words: she, he, they

Communicative Functions: Humor



Sign Posts (videos)

StepInAAC.org/P-Week19 (YouTube playlist)

19-1: Building Community with AAC

Video: StepInAAC.org/V19-1-BuildCommunity

19-2: Social Power with AAC: Introduction Message

Video: StepInAAC.org/V19-2-SocialPowerIntroMessage

Handout: StepInAAC.org/H19-2-SocialPowerIntroMessage



Travelog (newsletter)

StepInAAC.org/N-Week19 (Online / PDF)

Topics:

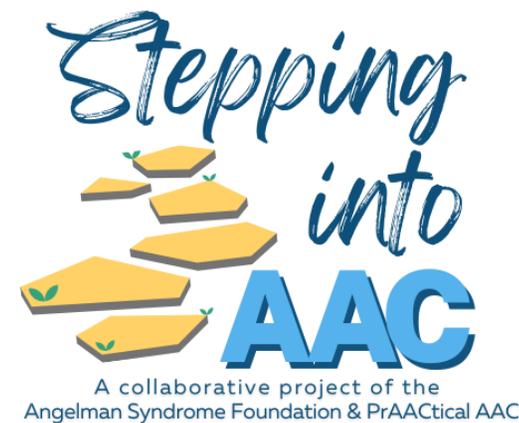
- Building an Effective AAC Team
- Team Accountability
- More to Explore

Question of the Week: "I'm worried that my child's teachers & therapists won't support AAC. What can I do?"



AAC Outside the Family

While AAC might start with close family, your circle of communication partners will grow over time. Invite friends, teachers, or neighbors to also point to words when communicating with your child. Remind them that AAC doesn't have to be formal and shouldn't be bossy or unnatural. It should sound like regular conversation - sprinkled with humor and interesting topics. It is helpful to learners when we show AAC used by a variety of people for a variety of reasons.



Hands-on Activities

Day 1

ASK: Invite someone to try AAC with you. Try asking back and forth questions like, Who is taller? (HE IS!) Who is faster? (SHE IS!) Who is funny? (THEY ARE!)

Day 2

FIND: Create some laughs today! Try a funny prop like a silly hat or whoopie cushion. I wonder what is different? HER hat! Who did it? HE did!

he

she

they



Day 3

JOKE: Try out some jokes with your friends and ask for feedback. Ask if others know any good jokes. Does HE? Does SHE? Are THEY funny?

Day 4

PLAY: Think of a simple tag or hide and seek game. Invite others to join and show them how to say: Where did SHE go? Did THEY tag you?

Day 5

SHARE: Make a list of people outside your immediate family that are part of your world. Who has heard about AAC? Who can you invite to try AAC with your learner?





Social Power with AAC: Introduction Messages

A collaborative project of the Angelman Syndrome Foundation and PrAACtical AAC

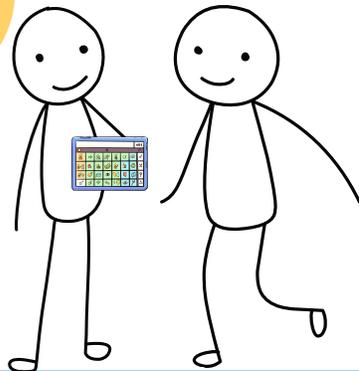
Introduction messages are pre-programmed messages that give basic information or instruction to unfamiliar communication partners.

These messages help break-the-ice, & invite others to interact with AAC users.

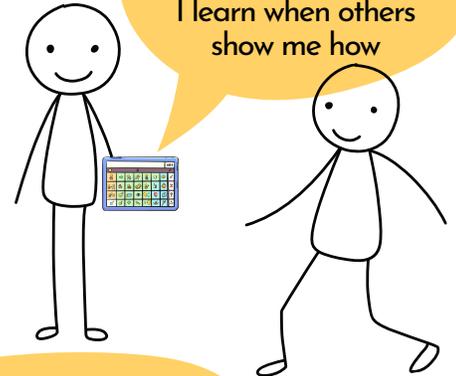
Characteristics of Introduction Messages:

- brief & clear
- fit the learners age and personality
- may tell how to support the AAC learner
- may tell about how to interact with the AAC learner
- changes over time
- may differ for different communication partners.

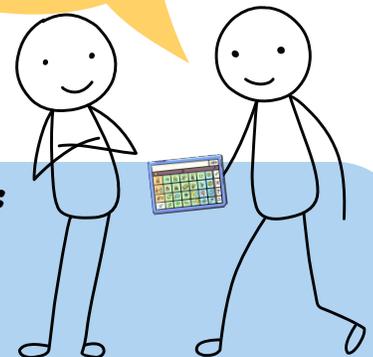
I understand you & will respond with this device. Please be patient.



I am learning how to communicate with AAC. You can take a turn too. I learn when others show me how



My aide and I make a good team, but please talk directly to me. I'm the social one & will respond with my AAC.



Intro Messages set Learners up for Success by:

- giving them a clear way to initiate
- demystifying AAC for unfamiliar communication partners
- informing communication partners about their role in the interaction
- establishing boundaries to ensure the AAC learner's communication needs, style, & preferences are honored



Links & Attributions

Social Power: Introduction Messages



Stepping Into AAC homepage:
stepinaac.org/Welcome



Video :
stepinaac.org/V19-2-SocialPowerIntroMessage



Handout:
stepinaac.org/H19-2-SocialPowerIntroMessage



Stepping Into AAC, Week 19 bundle:
stepinaac.org/WB19



AAC Graphics created by:

Drawn to AAC: www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Drawn-To-Aac



Inside this Issue

TEAM ACCOUNTABILITY

How can we best support our learner's AAC team?

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

"I'm worried that my child's teachers & therapists won't support AAC. What can I do?"

MORE TO EXPLORE

References, links to videos, resources



BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE AAC TEAM

Learning Together

When it comes to AAC, we know it takes a village, as the saying goes. And when AAC learners have several people in their lives who implement the key strategies we've discussed so far, it creates the kind of consistency that rewards us with positive outcomes. Communication learning takes time & the support of those around us. How do you go about building an effective AAC team?

Let's consider some important factors.

CONTINUED ON P. 2



BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE AAC TEAM

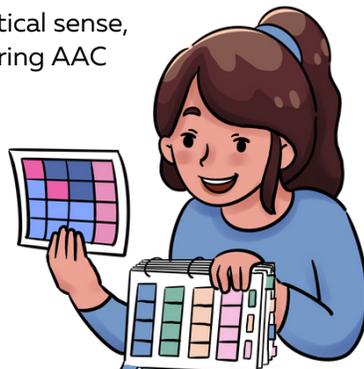
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Identify key members

As AAC teams go, parents have a vital function. Teachers & therapists come & go, but parents are lifelong supporters of communication growth. They often serve as the manager of the team, pulling together school-based professionals with private therapy providers & ensuring continuity over time. Professionals & paraprofessionals are the stakeholders we look to for guidance & are responsible for implementing the plan & monitoring performance.

When there are services at school & in the community, it's essential that they collaborate to share goals, strategies, implementation tips, & progress. This critical collaboration doesn't always happen naturally, though. Often, it is up to the parent to facilitate the connection & ensure that professionals from different organizations share information regularly & work in a collegial way.

In school settings, AAC support is generally provided by the IEP team plus the addition of another set of valuable stakeholders: the aides & assistants who spend the most time with our AAC learners. They often get left out of meetings & don't necessarily have access to written documents, so do what you can to loop them in. In a practical sense, they can be our strongest allies in ensuring AAC use throughout the day.



Learn More on Page 5

TEAM ACCOUNTABILITY

How can we best support our learner's AAC team?

You've had meetings, shared your thoughts, & the team says they're on board. In your discussions, members of the team have been receptive & have made tentative plans for implementation, but you don't really see much happening.

Unfortunately, your situation isn't the first, & it may not be the last. Knowing the best way to handle this type of situation & ensure that there is ongoing support & progress is going to serve you well throughout your AAC journey.

Your input & guidance is *invaluable*. You are as much a part of the team as teachers, therapists, & support staff. You know your child. What you've learned throughout this process, as well as any other AAC experiences, entitles you to be heard in a way that influences the team's decisions.

Saying something to the team may feel uncomfortable. You might even feel pushy. These feelings are completely normal. No one wants to be the squeaky wheel, but when your child's communication is on the line, it is so important that the entire team is on the same page.

If your child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), you have the ability to provide input to the IEP team. IEPs are legally binding documents &, therefore, what's written in the IEP must be followed. It is likely that there will be minimal AAC growth if implementation strategies are not being used, therefore, it is important to monitor the implementation of the IEP, ensuring that the data supports AAC implementation by team members more than your child's AAC growth. Weaving your input expertise into the IEP is one way to ensure that your team is held accountable.

Continued on page 4.



QUESTION OF THE WEEK

"I'm worried that my child's teachers & therapists won't support AAC. What can I do?"

You haven't built your team yet, but you are already concerned that there may not be much support given towards your child's AAC journey. The best way to go into an unknown situation is to prepare for any scenario that may arise.

Here are some examples of things that may happen & how parents went about solving their problems:

Amanda's family has been following the Stepping Into AAC journey for 14 weeks. Amanda has started consistently using her communication board to communicate a few words & has started seeking out the communication board during social interactions.

Her family is excited for the possibilities of her using her communication board at school. They have been mentioning AAC here & there with her teacher school therapists but have not yet established an AAC team.

Amanda's teacher & therapists often dismiss her parents' claims that the communication board is working, saying things like, "Oh well, that's surprising because she usually throws paper in here. We can barely keep things on her desk.". Dismissive comments like this show that the team is still pretty skeptical of AAC.

Amanda's parents decided to start collecting video examples of Amanda's AAC use at home. They shared positive moments of interaction & showed the skeptical team members the videos. Once team members saw firsthand the progress Amanda has made, they were more willing to implement it in the classroom.

Continued on page 4.

MORE TO EXPLORE

Uncommon Sense: Pulling your team together:

Looking for advice & ideas on how to encourage & collaborate with your child's AAC team? Check out this blog post by Dana Nieder, SLP & parent of an AAC user.

<https://stepinaac.org/AACTeam>



QUESTION OF THE WEEK

continued

Josue's father has taken the lead at home with his AAC journey. They have just wrapped up all 20 weeks of Stepping Into AAC content, & Josue has an established AAC team who has good intentions but not great follow through. Josue's IEP meeting is coming up, & his father gave input on the IEP draft he received. His input is met with dismissal, & Josue's teacher says things like, "Oh, we're not sure that we can implement that. There are 18 other children in the classroom, & it just can't be done." At this point, Josue's father decides to bring on an advocate to join him at the IEP meeting. During the meeting, the IEP team continues to be dismissive of Josue's communication rights. Josue's father decides to escalate & get other people (e.g., lawyers) involved to ensure his son gets what he needs.

This AAC journey is not always an easy one, but it is one that is worthwhile for your child. There are some situations that will be challenging, & you may feel like you are fighting an uphill battle with your child's team members. Keep steady & stay the course. Continue to share your child's wins with the team, help them feel like an integral part of this journey, and arm them with the tips & strategies you've learned with us.

“
...we're always afraid to
be that parent...
we're always afraid to
constantly be fighting
but that is our life.

”

*Kathryn, mother of Stetson, age 9,
Deletion + Angelman Syndrome*

TEAM ACCOUNTABILITY

continued

Additionally, if your child is using a high-tech AAC device, you can use the device to look at language use history throughout the day or week. You can see which words were used & you can track progress over time. You may have to subscribe to services such as Realize Language so you can see what AAC usage is like when you're not there.

Over the last few weeks, we've highlighted important concepts within the National Joint Committee's Communication Bill of Rights. This document is important to share with AAC teams so that they fully understand all of the ways in which our learners have the right to communicate, such as having "the right to access environmental contexts, interactions, & opportunities that promote participation as full communication partners with other people, including peers."

Building a good AAC team takes time, but accountability takes consistency. Ensure that your team has the means for open communication & plan routine check-ins for accountability.

“ *He reminds us, too, by
seeking it out.* ”

*Kathryn, mother of Stetson, age 9,
Deletion + Angelman Syndrome*



BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE AAC TEAM

continued



Clearly designate each person's role

When it comes to designating roles and responsibilities, it may be helpful to create a list of duties that will need to be delegated. For example, if your child has an AAC device, it is recommended that only one team member take the job of editing, changing, and adding vocabulary to the device. This is generally the SLPs role, and they should be designated as the architect of the language who guides the evolution of vocabulary and how words are arranged, and where they are located. There may be other team members who feel it is their responsibility to also make edits to the device, however, you should resist changes being made by those other than AAC trained. Well-meaning service providers may want to create a page or folder specific to the instruction or therapy they provide, but this should be avoided. Instead, re-direct them to the architect of the language system, your child's SLP. This can create some tension among team members which we can head off by setting this expectation early in the process. When we draw this line in the sand at the very beginning of the AAC journey, it keeps our egos in check and puts the focus on what is best for the child.

Team members who are *not* part of the AAC device programming process play roles that are even more important: They are responsible for implementing key AAC strategies on a day-by-day, minute-by-minute basis. By consistently using descriptive talking and aided language input, they are powerful drivers of growth and change. In practice, it takes added energy so be sure the contributions of these team members are recognized, respected, and rewarded.

What else should AAC teams be doing? Things that come to mind include ensuring that your child has access to their AAC system at all times, checking each morning to make sure the AAC tools are ready for use, charging the device if needed, and packing things up to go back home with your child at the end of the day. Ideally, it would be helpful to have someone communicate with you about how AAC use is going on a weekly basis, even if it is just a quick text or note. Whatever each person's role is, we need to set clear expectations from the beginning and make accountability checks as time moves forward.

Strive for a culture of progress

Teams work better when everyone is on the same page. Generally, people come in with good intentions, however, they may lose consistency or shy away from speaking with other team members. We want our team to be cohesive. Most often, cohesive teams are established when there is a shared goal. We need our team to be invested in our learner's progress.

Is our team collaborative? Can everyone work together to solve a problem? Obstacles will always come up, but if we have a team who is willing to collaborate to identify a solution, we can overcome these obstacles. Are our members thinking constructively? We want the team to identify when things are or aren't working. Are they self-reflective and aware of things they might individually need to change in order to help your learner move forward?

Decide how accountability will be measured

One of the most important things to establish when building an effective AAC team is how team accountability will be measured. We will only know if our team is being effective with their strategies if there is some system in place to measure growth and accountability of each person's responsibilities. Remember, we are looking to measure the quality and quantity of implementation more so than specific AAC growth. Why? Because we know that with regular and consistent use of AAC implementation strategies, we *will* see our learner's grow.

Establish regular team meetings

Each team's timeline and meeting schedule may be different. Find the schedule that works best for your team. It could be once a week, once a month, or once a quarter, but as long as there is a regular meeting happening, accountability can be upheld. You may even find it helpful to have somewhere for members to go to share concerns, wins, or share tips they've found helpful. This could be in the form of a shared virtual document.

Ensure that your learner is part of the decision-making process

When collaborating with your team, don't forget to include a key member... your child! While they may not be at the point where they're making their own communication decisions yet, they should always be informed about changes taking place or roles of the members. This does not have to be complicated. It could be something as simple as, "Isaiah, Miss Katie is going to make sure you have your talker out on your desk, okay?". Including our learner in this process will open the door for self-advocacy and informed decision-making in the future. Think back to the Communication Bill of Rights and how important this concept is for our learners.

Building an effective AAC takes time. It may not work like a perfectly oiled machine from the get go, but by using the tips above, you and your child's team can create an environment of consistency.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND LINKS



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Article of the Week:
Uncommon Sense: Pulling Your Team Together

<https://stepinaac.org/AACTeam>



Print all materials
from week 19 here:

STEPINAAC.ORG/WB19

