Teaching children to use augmentative communication devices

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Dedicated to All Better

Nonfinancial disclosure

Financial disclosure-none
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Some basic principles

1. Customize a device
   - vocabulary selection
   - use real images of people and personal things that add personalization.
   - save changes
2. Give them time to explore the device this is normal.
3. Pick one thing a child *wants* to say and then show them how to say it on the device.
4. Replace behavioral responses with communicative.
5. Reward positive behaviors
6. Ignore or redirect negative behaviors
7. Model use of device
8. Expand sentences

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Know your technology

- Every device will have contact information to a vender.
- Go to their website look around
- Know who the local venders are
- Follow blogs
- Learn how to do basic editing

Many different language set ups are available for download to your computer so you can play with the language and get familiar or even customize the set up without the child or device present.

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Keeping up with the physical device

Charging the device

How long is the battery life?
How to know if it is charged
Anticipating the need of being away from a wall socket
Do you charge one port or two

Updating

Updates are routinely pushed out by companies to fix bugs and enhance features in their devices. You can typically use either Wi-Fi or a usb drive to update the device

Repairing

Do you know the toll free technical support line to contact if there is a problem with the device?
What do you do if it stops working?
What do you do if it is lost or stolen?

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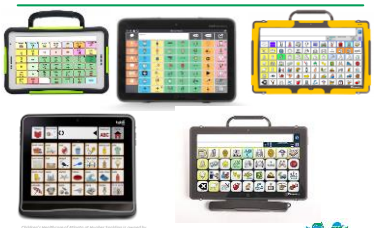
Lets get started



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Choosing a language set up

All good assessments will determine the best language encoding system for a child. There is a difference.

- **Logical linking**
- **Core based**
- **Some Logical linking with some core**
- **Minspeak/Unity**
- **Visual scenes**
  - **with phrases and with words**

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Some of the many language options on devices

Word power	Snap Plus Word Core
Grid 3	Sonoflex
Multichat	Core First
Gateway	PODD
Minspeak	LAMP
Unity	Word Core
Essence	

Within each encoding systems there are typically numerous options regarding number of images or words per page.

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What to do if a language system has not been chosen.

Assess receptive vocabulary

Know what they know

Choose a vocabulary option that represents current and near future linguistic competency

Things to keep in mind when choosing language

- one size doesn't fit all
- you want to balance success and challenge without frustrating the child
- where do you anticipate they will be in the next year linguistically
- Impulsivity and level of frustration plays an important role in vocabulary selection and choosing a language encoding system

Vocabulary option chosen needs to represent the just right challenge in finding highly motivating messages

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Functions of communication

When choosing vocabulary for a device…… Remember, there are all different reasons why a child might choose to say something.

- Gaining attention
- Requesting
- Inquiring
- Informing
- Greeting
- Protesting
- Answering
- Practicing
- Repeating

Source from "Exploring Children's Communicative Intents," by R.S. Chapman.

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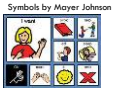
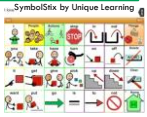
A word about different symbol sets

Boardmaker Picture Communication Symbols by Mayer Johnson



SymbolStix by Unique Learning



Minspeak/Unity Symbols by Prentke Romich Company

Widget Symbols by Tobii

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Less common symbol sets

Tactile symbols

High contrast Symbols

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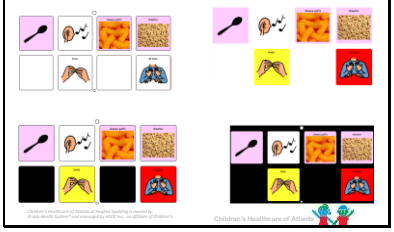
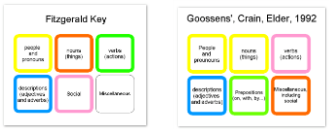
Color coding can enhance visual input



Color coding to enhance language

Fitzgerald color coding key

Goossens, Crain, and Elder modified coding key



Example of modified Fitzgerald key

Think about placement of symbols

- Use hide function on devices
- Think ahead about symbol placement
- Grow motor learning
- Use tactile covers

- A board should have left to right placement of symbols as a sentence would unfold

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Start with whatever they are already saying behaviorally.

- Take some time to get to know a child.
- What do they like?
- What don't they like?
- How are they trying to communicate with behavior
- Ask yourself "What would you be motivated to say if you were that child?"
- How can you limit distracters
- Many of these kids teeter on the brink of being taught and being pushed over the edge! It's a balancing act

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Slowly Grow Language Focusing on

- Expanding picture symbol repertoire
- Expanding linking symbols
- Improving accuracy
- Fading cueing
  - Tactile cueing
  - Physical cueing
  - Verbal cueing

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At first it was all about the snack

But then the child was also motivated
To request sensory based activities

Combined language and used aided language stimulation

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What is Aided Language Stimulation

Definition
Aided language stimulation (ALS) is a communication strategy, where a communication partner teaches symbol meaning and models language by combining his or her own verbal input with selection of vocabulary on the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system. This is done by simultaneously selecting vocabulary on the AAC system and speaking.
-aacinstitute.org

•Model only key words
•Use routines that are familiar
•Select highly motivating and highly reoccurring vocabulary to develop

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Teaching communication to kids with indirect access

- Provide numerous opportunities a day to communicate
- 200 switch hits daily for motor response to become a motor based response and not cognitive.
- Conserve effort watch for fatigue
- Use same principles for vocabulary selection
- Use logical linking to help with message production.

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Multimodality communication

Multimodal communication is using many different methods of acceptable forms of communication. For instance, *vocal approximations* along with *signs* along with *low tech symbols* along with *voice output systems*. These different systems can be used in conjunction with each other as well as

to support or to expand on communication.

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Getting the most from your technology

- Videos
- Music
- Schedules
- Photo album
- Sharing News
- Environmental Controls
- Alexa/Siri

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What does a communicator look like?

- John uses a device at school and at home. He has about 10 images per screen and can link simple words together.
- He uses a step by step when he gets home to tell his mom about his day
- At home he uses a visual schedule so that when he goes on a field trip tomorrow instead of to music class he doesn't get upset because he knows what to expect.
- At school he goes to OT who shows him a visual model to tie his shoes.
- He doesn't have his device out when he is walking down the hall so he uses a hip talker to greet people he sees
- He has a low tech badge he uses when he needs to go to the bathroom.

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Involve everyone

- Speech therapist
- Teacher
- Friends
- Family
- Occupational therapist
- Child
- Aids

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Communication is Power

Language is like a snowflake, unique to each of us. How successful a child is using a communication device ultimately depends on their unique physical, social, and emotional needs! No two children are exactly the same. Everyone is different in what they bring to the table.

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