Support Language Growth with AAC:

How Aided Language Stimulation Can Help

One of the best ways to support language in early intervention is to create a language rich environment, and it's no different for children using AAC! Research shows that the earlier children are exposed to their communication system, the better their long-term language outcomes *(Romski et al., 2010)*. Think about how children learn to talk. They hear thousands of words before they say their first word. Children using AAC need the same rich exposure and consistent models to their AAC system from an early age.

What is Aided Language Stimulation?

Aided Language Stimulation (ALS), often referred to as modeling, is an evidence-based strategy where communication partners model language using an AAC system while speaking naturally *(Goossens', 1989)*.

The Aided Language Stimulation technique:

1. **Speak the complete sentence naturally -** don't change how you normally talk

2. **Point to 1-2 key words** on the AAC device while you speak

3. **No pressure or expectations -** don't require the child to respond or imitate

> **" Why aided language stimulation works:**
>
> **Research demonstrates children who receive early**, consistent aided language stimulation develop stronger receptive language skills, better understanding of communication functions, and more robust expressive language abilities over time *(Drager et al., 2006; Binger & Light, 2007)*.

Play
"My turn to build!"
(point to MY + TURN)

Meals
"I want more goldfish"
(point to WANT + MORE)

Reading
"The bear is big"
(point to BIG + BEAR)

Caregiving
"Let's put on shoes"
(point to PUT + SHOES)

Transitions
"Time to go home"
(point to GO + HOME)

Tips for Success

DO:

- Provide aided language stimulation frequently throughout the day
- Model various communication functions (commenting, requesting, protesting, greeting)
- Use the AAC device yourself as you communicate with the child
- Start with high-interest activities and preferred items
- Focus on core vocabulary that can be used across situations
- Be patient and consistent - learning takes time
- Celebrate all communication attempts, not just AAC use
- Ensure the device is always accessible and positioned appropriately

DON'T:

- Say "You say it," "Touch the button," or give direct prompts
- Withhold desired items until AAC is used
- Turn every interaction into a teaching opportunity
- Expect immediate imitation or responses
- Get discouraged if progress seems slow

Remember: Input comes before output

- Children typically understand AAC before they use it
- Your child may watch and listen for weeks or months before trying
- Small signs of progress count (looking at the device, touching it, etc.)
- Every child learns at their own pace
- Consistent modeling is more important than perfect modeling

Trust the process! Just like learning to walk or talk, learning AAC takes time and lots of practice seeing it used.

References

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