

Community Activity: Doctor's or Dentist's Office



OBJECTIVE

Going to the doctor's or dentist's office can be an intimidating experience for many children. A great way to help them prepare is to discuss what will happen beforehand. For AAC users, incorporating their communication device when preparing for appointments can help them understand what to expect. Using the AAC device during appointments empowers users to have more control and express their feelings effectively!

BEFORE LEAVING FOR AN APPOINTMENT



Communication Opportunity

Preparing for what will happen.

Communication Facilitation

Several days before the appointment, begin using the AAC device to explain where you will be going. Use icons like “go” and the specific day of the week to discuss timing. Label the type of appointment and what they can expect (e.g., “look+in+ears,” “listen+heart”). This preparation helps reduce anxiety and builds understanding. Ensure all necessary vocabulary is programmed on the device for the specific appointment you'll be attending.

ARRIVING AT THE APPOINTMENT



Communication Opportunity

Greeting the receptionist and signing in.

Communication Facilitation

If age-appropriate, encourage your AAC user to greet the receptionist and state their name to check in for the appointment. Practice this interaction before entering the building. Using the speech bar to prepare a message allows your user to hit the speak button when needed. If your AAC user isn't ready to practice device use with unfamiliar people, model on the device yourself when you arrive to increase their comfort with new communication partners.

IN THE WAITING ROOM



Communication Opportunity

Labeling items and managing anxiety.

Communication Facilitation

Type the message in the speech bar so the user can play the sentence when they are ready. Or try using the device yourself during check in to increase their comfort with using the device with new communication partners.

DURING THE APPOINTMENT



Communication Opportunity

Answering questions and identifying procedures.

Communication Facilitation

Label on the device the activities happening during the appointment in real-time. This provides both visual and verbal explanations, potentially making the experience less intimidating. Based on your user's language abilities, encourage them to answer the provider's questions using their device. They can select how they're feeling, identify if anything hurts, or answer yes/no questions! Involving healthcare providers in this communication process can create positive associations with using the AAC device in medical settings.

LEAVING THE APPOINTMENT



Communication Opportunity

Discussing feelings and next steps.

Communication Facilitation

After the appointment, ask your user how they're feeling about the experience. Discuss specific aspects they liked or didn't like. If stickers or treats are available at the office, allow them to choose what they want using the device. If they can access a preferred activity after the appointment (e.g., visiting the park, iPad time, ice cream), let them select what they would like or model the options for them! Reinforcing successful communication during difficult experiences builds confidence for future appointments.