AAC Implementation Tips

10 Tips for Supporting AAC Implementation

1 **Assume Everyone Has Potential -** Believe that each person possesses the innate capacity to learn, connect, communicate, hone literacy skills, and make a positive impact in society. Foster this belief by offering a comprehensive AAC system, literacy teachings, and showcasing AAC techniques as early and frequently as possible. Remember, it's never too late to start!

2 **Always Demonstrate AAC in Action!** Infants grasp spoken language through consistent exposure and numerous models. AAC users are no different. Enhance their learning by speaking while pointing to corresponding symbols on the AAC device. It's okay to model just a few key words from your sentence. And as you grow more adept, your modeled phrases can exceed the AAC user's typical word length by 1-2 words. Note: There's a clear distinction between prompting (encouraging someone to speak) and modeling (serving as an example). By modeling AAC, we impart the significance of symbols and facilitate language growth without obliging a specific response that might not echo the communicator's intentions.

3 **Don't Let Perfect be the Enemy of Good!** It is O.K. if you don't know everything about implementing AAC. The implementation process is often as unique as the AAC user. Learning alongside the user can often strengthen the bond between clinician and user. Don't know where a specific button/ folder is? That can be the perfect time to model your frustration before resuming your search! When you find what you were looking for... model how you good it made you feel!

4 **Prompt with Care -** While our instinct is to assist and fill silences, over-helping can foster dependency and send unintended messages. Be cautious about how you encourage AAC learners to speak. Refrain from dictating their words. Also, hand-over-hand prompting can lead to unwanted behaviors, so use an AAC prompt hierarchy if uncertain.

5 **Engage Rather Than Examine -** Individuals with complex communication needs often feel restricted in many life facets. Making language feel like a chore or test can be discouraging. Always ask, "Am I teaching language or merely testing?" Keep it engaging! TIP: Starting sentences with phrases like "Maybe" or "I wonder" is beneficial. For instance, you could express, "You seem agitated. Perhaps you're angry?" while displaying the relevant emotion and corresponding AAC symbol. This way, you're offering an interpretation without assuming or expecting a reaction.

6 **Be Patient; Wait Longer** - Many AAC users need extra time for comprehension and response formulation. Even though the urge to interject can be strong, be patient. Silently count and wait for a good 10-15 seconds before intervening. During this pause, maintain an encouraging gaze, indicating your anticipation and respect for their input.

7 **Promote All Language Functions, Not Merely Requests -** For comprehensive communication—from expressing needs to forming connections—we must master every language function. Thus, AAC learners should not only be taught to request but also to comment, describe, inquire, protest, defend their stand, and more.

8 **Tailor AAC Systems to the User -** For daily tools like AAC systems, personalization is key. Customizations might encompass vocabulary choice, visual themes, auditory settings, icons, language layout, voice selection, accessibility features, and more. Always aim for a blend of core vocabulary, specific phrases, and an integrated keyboard. Additionally, prioritize involving the AAC user in any customization processes.

9 **Allow Ample Time for Language Absorption -** Typically developing children take years to perfect their language skills. It's unjust to expect AAC learners to become fluent immediately upon receiving their system. Recognizing the unique learning curves of individuals with complex communication needs, it's essential to allocate even more time and resources for their linguistic growth.

10 **Cultivate a Supportive Environment** Encourage those around the AAC user, like family, friends, and educators, to learn and use AAC effectively. Provide training and support to ensure everyone can communicate inclusively. Collaboration and inclusivity amplify the AAC user's communication experience. AAC should be integrated into daily interactions and routines for maximum effectiveness.