AAC Implementation Tips

10 Tips for Supporting AAC Implementation

1 Assume Everyone Has Potential

Believe that each person has the capacity to learn, connect, communicate, build literacy skills, and make a positive impact in society.

- Offer a robust AAC system, teach literacy, and model AAC as early and frequently as possible.

2 Demonstrate AAC in Action

Infants grasp spoken language through consistent exposure and many models, so do AAC users!

- Model AAC by speaking while pointing to the corresponding symbols on the device.
- Start small. Model 1-2 keywords at first, then expand from there.
- Remember: there's a difference between prompting (encouraging someone to speak) and modeling (serving as an example)

3 Don't Let Perfect Be the Enemy of Good

It's okay if you don't know everything about AAC. The process is often as unique as the AAC user.

- Learning alongside the user can strengthen the bond between you and the user.
- Don't know where a specific button or folder is? Model how to fix a mistake! This teaches users that mistakes are okay and how to fix them.

4 Prompt With Care

Avoid over-helping which can foster dependency and send unintended messages.

- Be careful about how you encourage users to speak and refrain from dictating their words.
- Instead of prompting, try giving users extended wait time, cueing the user by pointing to the device, or using a visual reminder to use the device.

5 Engage Rather Than Examine

Individuals with complex communication needs often feel restricted in many aspects of life. Making language feel like a chore or test can be discouraging.

- Always ask, "Am I teaching or testing language?"
- Offer an interpretation instead of assuming. Starting sentences with "Maybe" or "I wonder" encourages interaction.

6 Be Patient; Wait Longer

Many AAC users need extra time for response formulation and comprehension. Resist the urge to interrupt; patience is key.

- Silently count and wait for 10-15 seconds before interjecting.
- While waiting, maintain an encouraging gaze, indicating your anticipation and respect for their input.

7 Promote All Language Functions

For well-rounded communication skills, AAC users need to master many language functions outside of requesting.

- Teach users to request, comment, describe, inquire, protest, defend their stance, and more!

8 Tailor AAC Systems to the User

Customize the AAC system for your user's specific needs and include them in the process.

- Update vocabulary, auditory settings, icon images, language layout, voice selection, and more!
- Aim for a blend of core vocabulary and fringe phrases. Consider an integrated keyboard.

9 Allow Time for Language Learning

Children take years to perfect their language skills. It's unrealistic to expect AAC learners to become fluent upon receiving their device.

- Recognize the unique learning curves of people with complex communication needs. Allocate more time and resources for their language building to support them!

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.
- Integrate AAC into daily interactions and routines.

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