

Honoring All Communication Attempts

Communication isn't one-size-fits-all. It comes in many forms like speaking, texting, writing notes, or body language. No one way is better than another. For individuals who need communication supports, functional communication can use a combination of methods..

✓ What Communication Can Look Like

- **Nonverbal:** gestures, body movements, facial expressions, signs, eye blinks or gaze
- **Behavior-based:** pushing away, crying
- **Verbal:** vocalizations, word approximations, spoken words
- **Communication Supports:** speech-generating devices, pictures

✓ Acknowledging All Attempts

- Assume every communication attempt has meaning.
- Respond to every communication attempt.
- Interpret what the individual may be trying to convey and respond appropriately.
- Expand or model language when applicable.

✓ How This Technique Benefits Users

- Builds trust and confidence
- Reduces frustration and communication breakdowns
- Increases meaningful interactions
- Expands exposure to new language

As communication partners, our role is to acknowledge and reinforce all meaningful attempts, especially the ones that come naturally to the user.

When You're Unsure

Sometimes attempts are hard to interpret, and it's important to honor them anyway. By presuming all communication is intentional, we encourage users to keep going and keep learning language. Get curious about possible meanings by:

- Avoiding ignoring attempts when you're unsure of their meaning
- Asking for clarification
- Reflecting on possible meanings
- Using visual supports to help elaboration
- Encouraging the individual to try again or say it a different way

On an AAC device, a user may select a word that seems out of place. Honor that attempt by following their lead and **recasting** their selection to confirm their message.

Quick Examples

COMMUNICATION ATTEMPT	POSSIBLE MEANINGS	COMMUNICATION PARTNER RESPONSE
Throws toy	All done, disinterest, frustration	<i>"I see you're all done with the toy! We'll put it away."</i>
Smiles	Enjoyment, happy	<i>"I see you smiling, that tells me you're happy! We're having fun!"</i>
Shifts eye gaze toward a person or object	Interested, wanting person/object	<i>"You're looking at the bubbles, are you thinking about more bubbles?"</i>
Turns head or body away	Doesn't like, frustrated, scared	<i>"You're turning away. That tells me you don't like this. Let's take a break."</i>
Hands an object to a partner	Asking for help, sharing, requesting	<i>"You brought me a puzzle. Do you need help?"</i>

When the AAC team models together, **the user progresses.**