



A Framework for Augmentative and Alternative Communication

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Augmentative and alternative communication, AAC, includes a broad array of information, systems and supports. Much like individuals on the autism spectrum, AAC users come in all shapes in sizes. As professionals making AAC recommendations, it can be daunting to determine where to begin and what is the best choice for each individual. One helpful framework in this decision making process is the SETT Framework (Zabala, 2010) which stands for student, environment, task and tools. This framework can help identify the needs of AAC users in a variety of different settings and activities to provide the specific supports needed.

Student

The student or individual is the primary consideration when making AAC decisions. It is important to take into account the student's abilities, needs, and motivation as related to communication. As a support team, it must be determined where the individual's abilities lie. For example, do they have joint or shared attention, use gestures or pictures supports to communicate etc. Professionals must comprehensively evaluate the individual's communication abilities (motor capabilities for access, representational skills, verbal abilities etc.) and begin building on the

skills they have mastered. The student's needs and motivation must also be taken into account (why does the individual need to communicate and why do they initiate a communicative interaction?) This can often be determined through behavior observation. As educators and therapists, it is essential to identify and incorporate motivating opportunities specific to the individual's needs in order to teach the power of communication.

Environment

The purpose and situational requirements of communication and AAC supports change with each new environment. It is essential to carefully examine the varied requirements of each setting for the individual AAC user. Some examples of considerations include who will the individual be interacting or communicating with and what equipment, materials or supports are available? Communication opportunities must be provided for AAC users to communicate naturally in all contexts as learning language is most effective in meaningful contexts, not in isolated drill-based activities unimportant to the individual.

Task

Successful opportunities for students to actively participate and communicate with others when completing any task in their environment should be an overarching goal for AAC users. To create these opportunities, each task must be broken down to determine what the specific communication requirements are and opportunities must be created for participation within a variety of activities. One powerful way to increase opportunities for communication using AAC is to provide opportunities to make choices so the individual feels in control and learns how communication can support them.

Tools

The final step in the SETT framework involves looking at the specific features of the AAC system and making a recommendation for the individual. For most AAC users, the use of multiple communication systems, incorporating a variety of communication modalities (gestures, visual supports, picture/symbol systems, voice-output systems etc.) is more effective than using a single system. Multi modal communication provides a "tool box" full of ways for the AAC user to communicate. Implementing an AAC system can be an intimidating task. No matter which system is recommended, keep in mind the

following: the system must be modeled and used consistently across environments and tasks with the individual; communication must be meaningful; planning, collaboration, and ongoing support between all members of the individual's support team are crucial for successful implementation and use of the AAC system.

MARCH TRAININGS

March 5, 3:30-4:15

Webinar Series: Four Part Series on Data Collection: Part 3

Link to register: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TASN-ATBS-web13>

Direct link to our website:

www.KansasASD.com

www.TASNBehaviorSupports.com

TIPS FROM THE CORNER:

Field trips can be stressful and present many unexpected challenges. Here are some tips to use when preparing for and taking students on field trips:

1. Tell students that they are going to participate in a field trip one to two weeks in advance. This gives you the opportunity to teach expected behaviors and gives students the time to get their excitement out and then calm down as well as an opportunity to practice the skills that they will need on the field trip.
2. Prepare a schedule, which indicates the order in which things will occur on the field trip. This should begin with lining up for the field trip and end with the students sitting in their seat when they return to school. Details are important!

3. Make sure that the schedule can be manipulated. We all know that "things happen" while on field trips and schedules may change.
4. Remain calm and flexible! Model the behavior that you expect of your students.
5. Bring a "survival bag". This bag can be used while on the bus, while waiting and during other times that a student may become agitated. You can include calming activities, sensory-based objects and anything else that the student may need while on the field trip.
6. Have fun and enjoy this time with your students! As teachers, we can learn a lot about our students while spending time outside of the classroom.

