

Event: #7951 AT for Communication: Basic Tips & Strategies for Starting AAC with Students

Date: 11/03/23

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>> Tori Adamson: Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to our third webinar part of our series that Tools for Life and Georgia Department of Education have partnered to give to you. My name is Tori. I'm the outreach specialist here at Tools for Life. We're glad to have you on today. Just a housekeeping things. This webinar is being recorded and will be available for viewing later, as well as a transcript of what is being said. Our captions are being provided today by Center for Inclusive Design and Innovation. Our captionist is Heather. So thank you Heather. I will be putting the link in the chat as well. So in case anyone joins later you can access them there. Please use the chat box for questions or comments you have throughout the webinar. I will be monitoring those and I will ask them to our presenter as they come through. Now I will toss it over to Paula Gumpman.

>> Paula Gumpman: Hi, everyone. I'm the AT person at the Georgia Department of Education. I'm here to introduce Jennifer Ro. Jennifer is an SLP on staff at Tools for Life. She's got a lot of experience with AAC. I believe that will be the majority of the things we're talking about today. Her wealth of knowledge around assistive technology is also

impressive. She's worked at a variety of capacities and doing an amazing job.

>> Jennifer Ro: Thank you so much, Paula for that nice introduction. I feel like I barely recognized myself in that.

Hi, everybody. I'm glad you're here today. I'm a speech language pathologist. I've been working in the field of AAC for quite some time in a variety of different settings. I'm excited to talk about AT for communication and basic tips and strategies for starting AAC with students as a whole.

Some disclosures. As per ASHA guidelines my financial disclosures I'm an employee of Tools for Life which is part of Center for Inclusive Design and Innovation at Georgia Tech. I'm an AT-AAC consultant. I'm a member of ASHA, the special interest group 12, and a member of USS AAC. I'm on the committee there as a member of the AAC awareness committee.

So our agenda for today so we're all on the same page. We'll review the definitions of AT and augmentative alternative communication and how to get started with AAC and basic strategies. Last we'll talk about a few things to consider when thinking about robust AAC for a specific student and what kinds of supports are available for school districts through the Georgia DOE, Tools for Life AT partnership.

I just realized that I need to turn my camera off because I get very distracted when I see myself moving around

there. So I hope that's okay. I'm going to turn my video off for everybody and focus on talking.

Okay. So our next slide is what is assistive technology? Basically it's a device or item, piece of equipment, product system whether acquired commercially or off the shelf, modified or customized to increase, maintain and improve the functional capabilities of the children with disabilities. The definition is on the Georgia DOE website. It comes from the IDEA. Including hardware, software, and standalone devices. It really can be any tool that can really be considered an assistive technology device. The definition is fairly broad because they wanted to give IEP teams flexibility to make decisions about appropriate AT devices for students.

AT includes technology includes tools that are necessary for students in the IEP. So one thing we run into is a lot of our school districts have Google Read&Write. It's available for all children in the schools. How you want to think about assistive technology and documenting it into the IEP if the student were to move to a different district and they don't have that tool available in the classroom -- it could be Google Read&Write but it could be a go talk now. If it's not available in the new school district, will they need it then? If they need something in particular throughout the day in their educational curriculum, make sure to document that in the IEP.

So, assistive technology is a continuum of tools, strategies and services that match a person's needs, abilities and tasks. So you'll see here that it goes from low/no-tech to mid-tech and high-tech devices.

Over all though to think about assistive technology and this continuum the goal is not to get students to using the most high-tech devices but to find the most effective and efficient tools for that particular task in context. So really what removes or minimize those barriers of the student's disability. It could be low/no-tech that is most effective. An example sometimes a simple picture support to quickly communicate that they need a break or perhaps they need a sensory tool to help them feel calm might be more efficient than using a high-tech AAC device in that moment.

So what is AAC? As per ASHA, AAC includes all forms of communication other than oral speech that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants and ideas. It's a form of communication other than verbal speech. It could include unaided forms of communication such as gestures. And also aided forms of AAC which are tools that people might use to help communicate their thoughts like communication boards, writing, texting, speech generated devices and apps on tablets.

The purpose of AAC is one to augment verbal speech and then two it could be an alternative for verbal speech for a child who has limited or no ability to communicate

verbally. So when you look at AAC in those terms, potentially any child who is verbal but may be difficult to understand might need a form of AAC in certain situations or context.

I've worked with a number of students whose verbal speech could be understood by familiar speakers but it was often in high school their team thought to look at AAC because of the transition from moving from high school. How will they be able to work and get around the community if they have a barrier, impact for speech intelligibility to communicate their thoughts and ideas.

So, our goal essentially for using AAC is really not to use AAC but to determine an effective communication method that matches the developmental abilities of the child and that can grow with them. It doesn't have to be one method. It could be several. So when you are considering AAC for students, definitely think about what will be their primary form of communication in the next 3 or 4 years and work towards that.

I caution not to assume that their verbal speech will vastly improve. Often times it will and we want that to happen. My goal always is to get a child as verbal as they can while supporting their communication abilities. But definitely start using AAC using the tools that you already have in your classroom and start making observations that supports their current abilities and what barriers are noted.

Other things: A child may have some understanding of what to communicate and how to communicate first. They need to have that before they can express. So I really want you to remember that communication is two-way. First there's understanding and then there's expression. For many of your students they have a developmental language delay. So, if you can help them with AAC first understanding how to use it and what to say will help them express using AAC as they progress in their learning.

We'll talk a little bit more about that in a little bit.

Another thing to keep in mind is there should be a long-term plan for overall growth. Help make that verbal language for your students so they will use it themselves knowing what their current communication abilities are is important. But also thinking about how their communication skills will grow and build upon what you teach them today is key.

What's nice about language development and using AAC is that there's actually a general road map. That road map is the developmental progression of language.

Now granted not all kids progress linearly. Some may have different holes here and there, but if you can get an idea of where they are, it will help you identify what are the key goals to help progress them and move forward with their

communication abilities.

So, getting started regarding classroom AAC tools.

So all school districts have different AAC supports and tools that are made available to their classrooms for teachers and students that are available to support communication right away. They can range from low to high-tech and if you can remember to use whatever AAC tools you have available for both understanding and expression, you will go a long way in helping your students progress. You must understand what you want to say in regards to children -- they must understand what they want to say and how and when to say it before they can express what they want to say independently.

So low or lite-tech supports I've seen single pictures, there was a word board called project core. You can make self-made boards. Definitely use vocabulary that is common and can be used frequently throughout the day. And then there's static boards of AAC devices that you can use also if you know a lot of your students wind up using a particular AAC device or app. A lot of class rooms have mid-tech with voice output. Some have status display devices like the go talks or the quick talkers.

>> Tori Adamson: We have a question. What is aided language communication or stimulation?

>> Jennifer Ro: We'll talk about that in a little

bit. That's a strategy to help an individual or a child with a disability understand language. We'll talk about that in a little bit briefly. If there's more questions about that, I will explain that more in depth when we get there. Thank you for that question. We will cover that. So you can use aided language input or aided language stimulation with these devices. So last thing on this slide and we'll be getting into strategies in a little bit. I know there are some districts that have dynamic display devices as their classroom core inventory. Some of these are a little bit more high-tech and robust but some of them can be programmed or page sets that are earlier levels that are appropriate for students that are just beginning. It just depends on what your districts provide.

So this is an example of a core word board. This is an 84 grid. This is a go talk 20+. It's a static display device where you can change the overlays.

In regards to getting started what you want to think about is choosing the right vocabulary. So choose words and phrases that can be used readily throughout the day in various situations and conversations. We're not going to talk about core vocabulary today but to high light there's about 375 words that account for 75% of the words that we use in communication. It's based on research from language samples about what's actually said in daily conversation. So if you think about those 400 words are used in 75% of what we say, so



hey we may need to target some of these 400 words 75% of the time.

Then there's other vocabulary that tend to be nouns like the word banana. I was with a group earlier today and I asked them to think about the word banana. How many times do you say the word banana? Maybe once during the day and likely never after breakfast time. So core vocabulary are words you see on the screen like play, want, not, stop, more. How many times would you say stop throughout the day? Or not throughout the day? Those are core vocabulary words.

When I say choose the right vocabulary, what you see on the screen here are things you want to think about when you're working with students. You definitely want to focus on core vocabulary. You want to have words that are classroom core or classroom core phrases. Then you also want to start kids interacting with people. So class mate and teacher names. And then there might be other words that are specific to your classroom that would be helpful.

So some ideas to take note of: When just starting take note of these characteristics because anything that you are doing with AAC whether that be low, mid, or high-tech devices they could actually point to a more individualized AAC system and they'll be important to take note of when you actually sit down and think okay what I'm using right now is not meeting their needs. What are the barriers? That will help

you think of a more individualized tool for a student.

Keep in mind that we're not going to get into this due to the length of the webinar but for students with significant motor impairments there's other factors than what is noted on the slide.

So for today's purposes, we could actually spend a whole session talking about motor abilities but for today's session if you're unclear, reach out to an OT or PT on their input on their ability to physically access any AAC tools that they use.

So, this is the slide that I was referring to in regards to aided language input. As I mentioned before, you want to think of both understanding and expression. I want you to think of AAC like you're learning a new language. So regardless of what AAC used whether it's low/no-tech or high-tech, develop communication skills through something called aided language input. This is essentially a fancy term for saying use the AAC device to talk to your student.

So for instance, aided language input is aiding your verbal speech by touching the AAC device and showing them how to use it. That's what aided language input is or aided stimulation.

So for instance, AAC is like learning a language. If you were learning Spanish, what's the best way to learn Spanish? You can't start speaking Spanish if someone says tell

me shoes without actually seeing someone say the word zapatos. So you would say tell me shoes and then you show the word shoes on the device.

Or if you see they want to go, you say tell me go, and you touch the word go. Or you say hey let's go to the lunch room. I hope that makes sense. Is really aided language input is aiding your verbal speech by giving them and showing them visually through you modeling use of the AAC.

>> Paula Gumpman: It's just a model. We want to show them how to use the device in front of them while we model. Without a model they don't know how to use it. So we use their things while we're being verbal.

>> Jennifer Ro: That's exactly it. If they don't see anyone using their AAC, it's very hard for them to pick it up themselves. Modeling is actually going to help move that needle for progress a lot quicker.

So our overall goal for AAC is spontaneous novel utterance generation. The more they see someone, adults, using their AAC device, knowing how to use it and what to say in specific situations, you have an increase likelihood of children watching you and then eventually using their AAC device to do the same thing.

You'll see at the bottom here there's a couple of videos here. After the presentation you can click those links. One is aided language stimulation explained. Then there's

another one that was developed by Tools for Life and Georgia DOE last year. That's more of a training and teaching one and that's on the CIDI website.

Then there's the other way to teach expression. These are quick strategies. Make sure that the AAC is always available. So if you use pictures. If they're not available to use, there's no way you'll get spontaneous novel utterance generation. No way if it's not out and available. Provide frequent opportunities for the student to initiate. Highlighting the word opportunity and initiate because often times we don't give our students enough wait time. How do we know they want to say something unless we give them that time. Sometimes they want to say something that we had no idea if we didn't give them the chance by waiting.

If there's no response after the wait time then you model something that's appropriate to what you said.

So a general rule of thumb is that the adult should touch the device 4 times to every 1 opportunity the child is given to use AAC to say something. So think about that. If you think of language immersion when you're in a Spanish classroom, the teacher is talking a lot in Spanish and every now and then she gives them the opportunity to speak Spanish.

The other thing is to also encourage AAC for a variety of things. Commenting, describing thoughts and

feelings.

So, I did want to let you know some things to consider. After you've done a trial with AAC and with tools in the classroom, there's some things that might make you think they're doing great. These are characteristics that might want you to look at something robust more quickly. And say hey maybe I need to move on this.

So some of these things are a student is able to initiate interactions independently, they show interest in a range of activities, they may be able to say 10-20 words or pictures to communicate something they want to do and an extra bonus is the family is interested in AAC and show strong support or active participation. All students can benefit from AAC. Even your verbal students that they have a language delay. It's helping them understand language and making it visual for them.

So we're almost done. We have a couple more slides. I wanted to leave with you guys some thoughts about robust AAC devices that are available in generally 3 categories -- or 3 groups of AAC devices that you may not have heard of before. There's some motor-pattern focused devices, some category or topic activity based apps and devices and then some literary focused or phrase-based apps or devices. If you see the initials TFL those are apps that we have available at Tools for Life that can be loaned for 4-6 weeks if you don't

have it in your district and you want to try it out. Those can be loaned out on an iPad.

One last thing and this is just to hit on universal design for learning. In order to maximize learning, AAC methods should be included in these three areas. So designing lessons that incorporate these elements and the concepts to focus on include A. That the students are interested in the lesson and then that students are personally motivated and have an idea of what to expect. B. To help them understand the elements of the lesson so that academic concepts or targets are meaningful and that language is presented in a meaningful way. And C. Allows multiple ways for the student to participate or communicate. This could be through gestures or verbal speech or actions. Communication is key for all of these elements. Therefore AAC should be included when you are designing lessons regardless of how verbal your students are in order to foster learning.

This is how you get support through AT partnership. It began in January 2020. It is an online portal. The directors and their designees can request AT or software tools or device demos or loans. Additionally through the AT partnership our braille program manages GIMC and we just rolled out EdTRADE that focuses on AT reuse. If you need information on the partnership, there's a link to that website.

This is essentially what our program is and

you'll see we're all things accessibility. We do disability related research, accessibility consulting, caption and described media, professional e-text and the last half of this slide are part of the Georgia DOE and Tools for Life partnerships.

And that actually is about all I have got. I'm surprised I ended up on time there. And I want to check in. Maybe a minute or 2 to see if there's any questions before we head out?

>> Tori Adamson: Wow, Jennifer. You finished at 4:00 on the dot.

>> Jennifer Ro: I'm surprised.

>> Tori Adamson: If anybody has any questions feel free to send those in the chat. We'll be on for a couple more minutes. Just to make sure everyone has asked those questions. I want to say thank you again for Jennifer for giving us this wonderful presentation today on AT and communication. It's all so very important in the classroom. So thank you so much. And this has been the last webinar in our series with the Department of Education. This webinar and the two previous will be available online. We'll work on getting those posted on the Department of Education website. Everyone should have access to that in the next few weeks. So feel free to share those once available, as well as the PowerPoint presentation and the transcripts from each of the webinars. I

don't see any questions coming through. Lots of thank yous. So that wraps it up for us.

>> Jennifer Ro: Thank you, have a great afternoon, everybody.

>> Tori Adamson: Thank you for joining.