

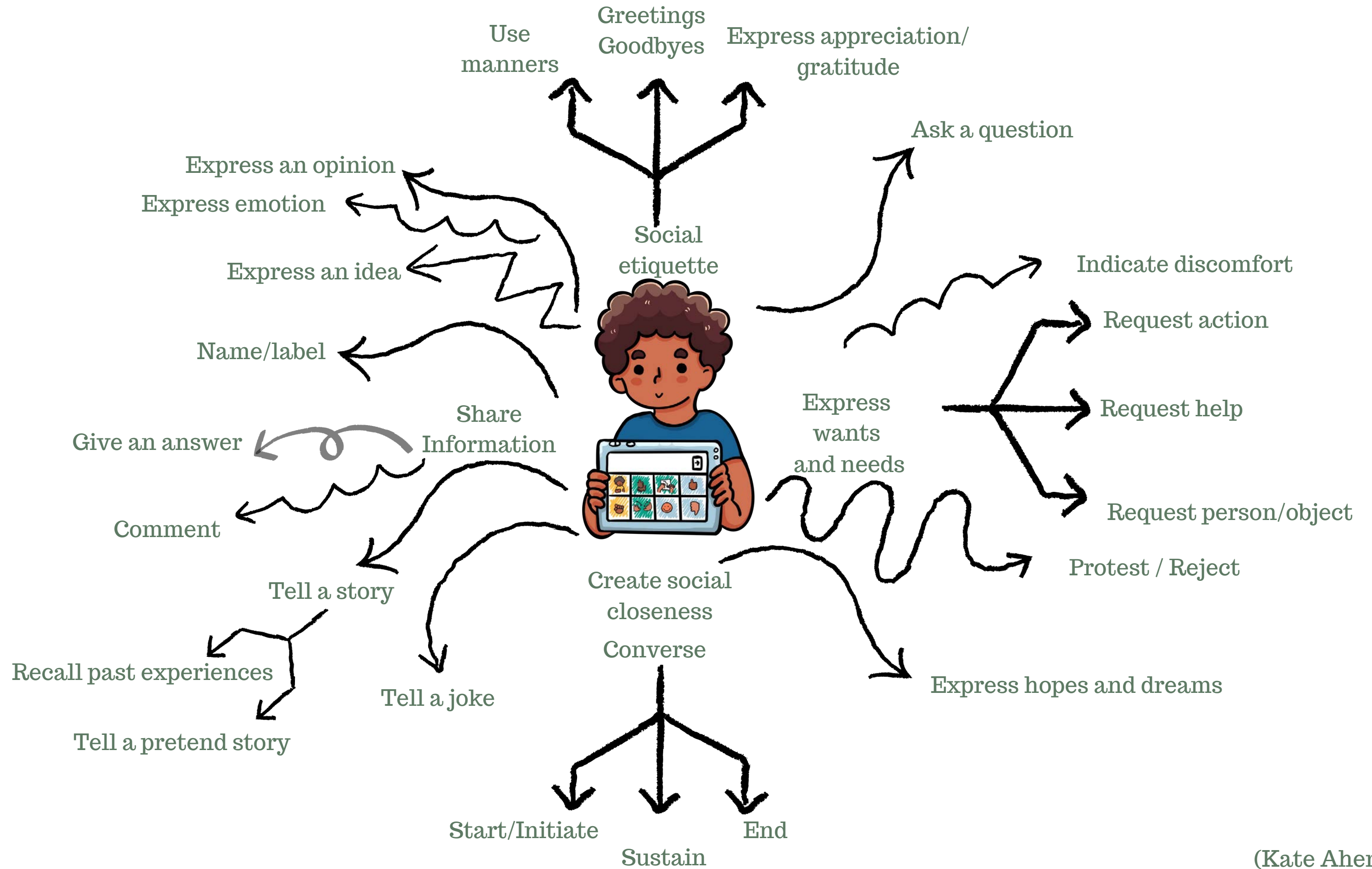
AAC: Creating Systems for Individual Success



Jane Farrall
RICAA Conference, 2023



Reasons We Communicate



Access to Communication



Access to communication impacts many aspects of our life, and it has a big effect on our quality of life.

Communication is fundamental in literacy development and for participation in education, as well as our participation in wider society.

Most importantly, access to communication is a human right. (United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).



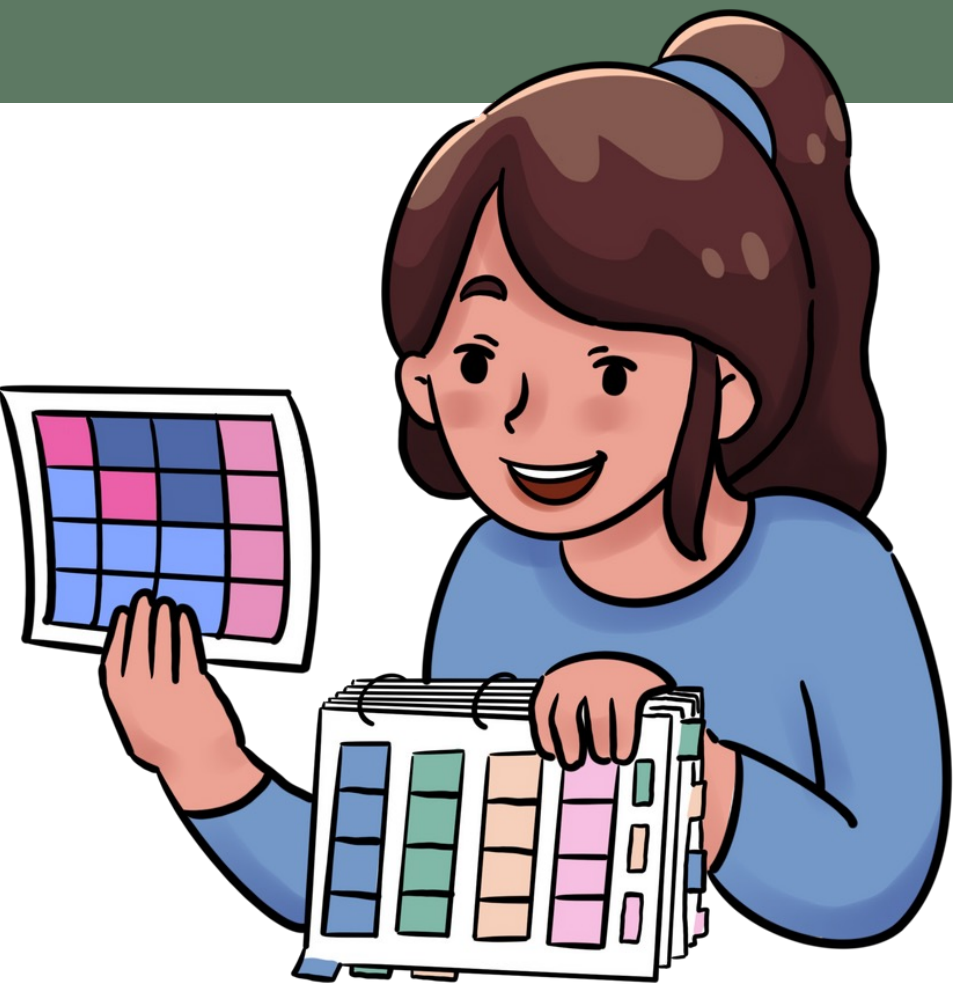
Every individual needs to become an autonomous communicator.



Supporting someone with complex communication needs to become autonomous, isn't just about them learning new skills!



Every person who is supporting them also needs to develop a range of skills.



Supporting Communication Development





**We need to
become skilled
communication
partners**



The journey to autonomous communication

Let's talk about the end of the
journey first!





Communication Autonomy

The ultimate goal for each of us, as we develop as communicators, is to become an autonomous communicator.

This is true if we communicate using speech.

And it is also true if we communicate using AAC.



**The goal of AAC
is
Autonomous
Communication**

"Being able to say what
I want to say,
To whoever I want to
say it to,
Whenever I want to say
it,
However, I choose to
say it."

Gayle Porter, PODD Developer



Let's Talk About What This Means....

Being able
to say what
I want to
say....

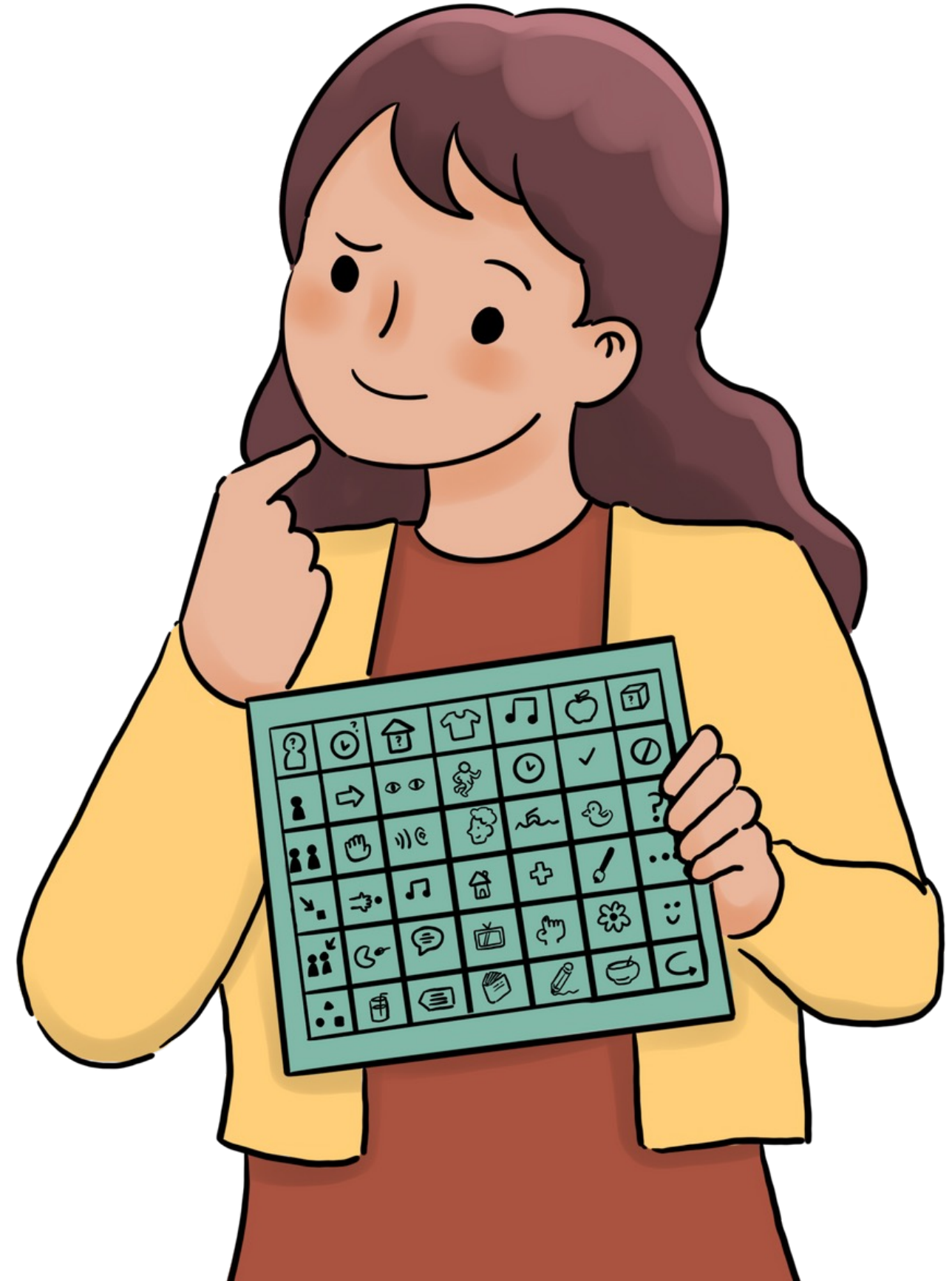
to whoever I
want to say
it to.....

however I
choose to
say it.

whenever I
want to say
it.....



**"What I
want to
say"**



**"Being able
to say what
I want to
say"**

A key part of this is the words "I want".

This means that every individual can say what they want to say.

Let's think about what this means.



It was a really
cold winter this
year!



**What
might the
responses
be?**



It was a short
winter....

I thought it was
quite warm....



What I want to say

Two different responses
from two different people.

There is nothing wrong
with them - they are just
different opinions.

Each individual is saying
what they want to say.





Individuals who use AAC also need to have the ability to say "what they want to say"

Individuals who use AAC also need to be able to express their opinion, whether we agree or not.

Individuals who use AAC also need to be able to tell others to "stop" or tell them "more".



Every Voice Counts

For someone who uses AAC it is important that they always have their communication system with them.

Their communication system is their voice

If it isn't with them, then they can't use it

If they can't use it, then they can't get their message across

If it isn't with them, they aren't an autonomous communicator





My Voice Counts, Every Minute

And if their AAC system is only with them some of the time, then they won't become autonomous.

If you can only express your opinion some of the time, then you start to think that your opinion doesn't really matter.....



My Voice, Every Minute

If an individual uses AAC, then the system needs to be customised with vocabulary that is appropriate to them.

For example, if they love football then we want to make sure the words that they need to talk about football are in their system!





**My voice,
every minute,
everywhere**

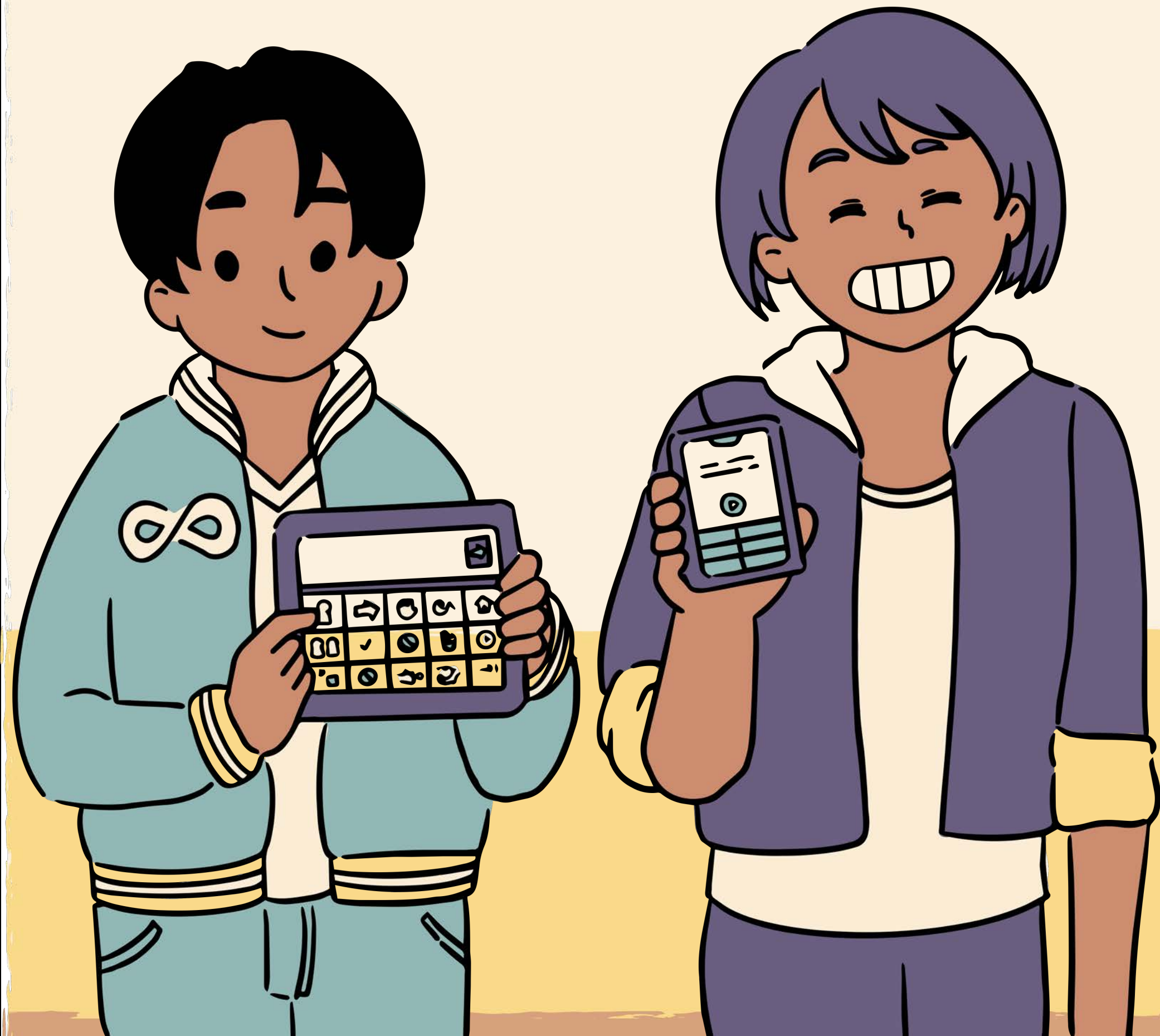
Once we've made sure that those words are in their AAC system, then it needs to be with them when they are watching the football

It needs to be with them when they are talking about the football

And then, because we can't pick when those football conversations are going to come up, we need to make sure that their AAC system is with them all the time.



**"To
whoever I
want to say
it to"**



My Choice

This seems obvious - we all have the choice of people we communicate with.

If you go to the football, it is up to you who you communicate with.

You might decide to:

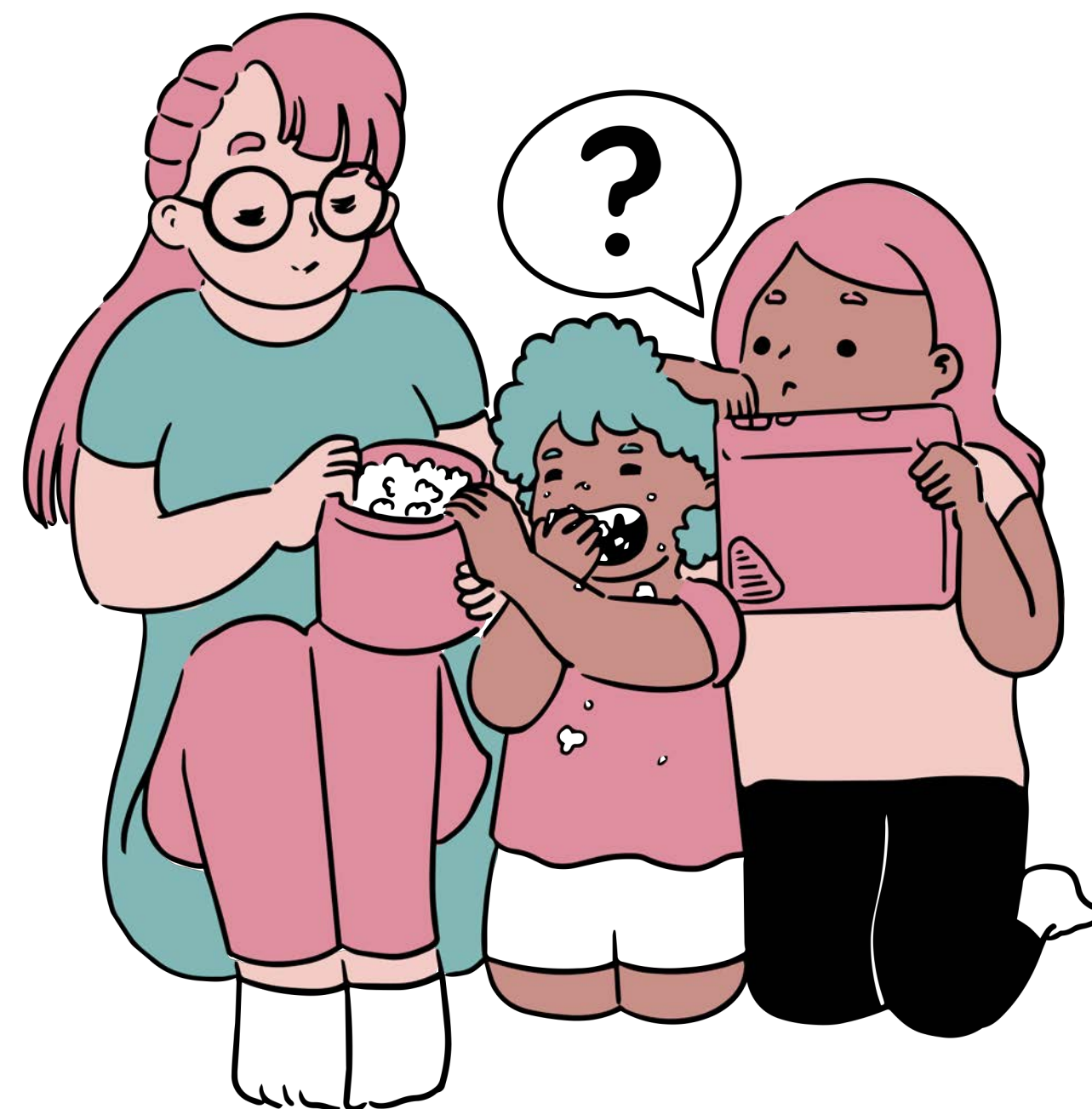
- throw insults at the umpire
- tell the players how good they are
- or to just sit quietly and watch



My Voice, My Choice

For individuals who are using AAC, this is an important part of communication autonomy.

Individuals who use AAC need to always have access to THEIR AAC system so that THEY make that decision.



My Voice, My Choice

If they don't have access to their AAC system at home, then they can't choose who they communicate with at home, and we are taking that decision away from them



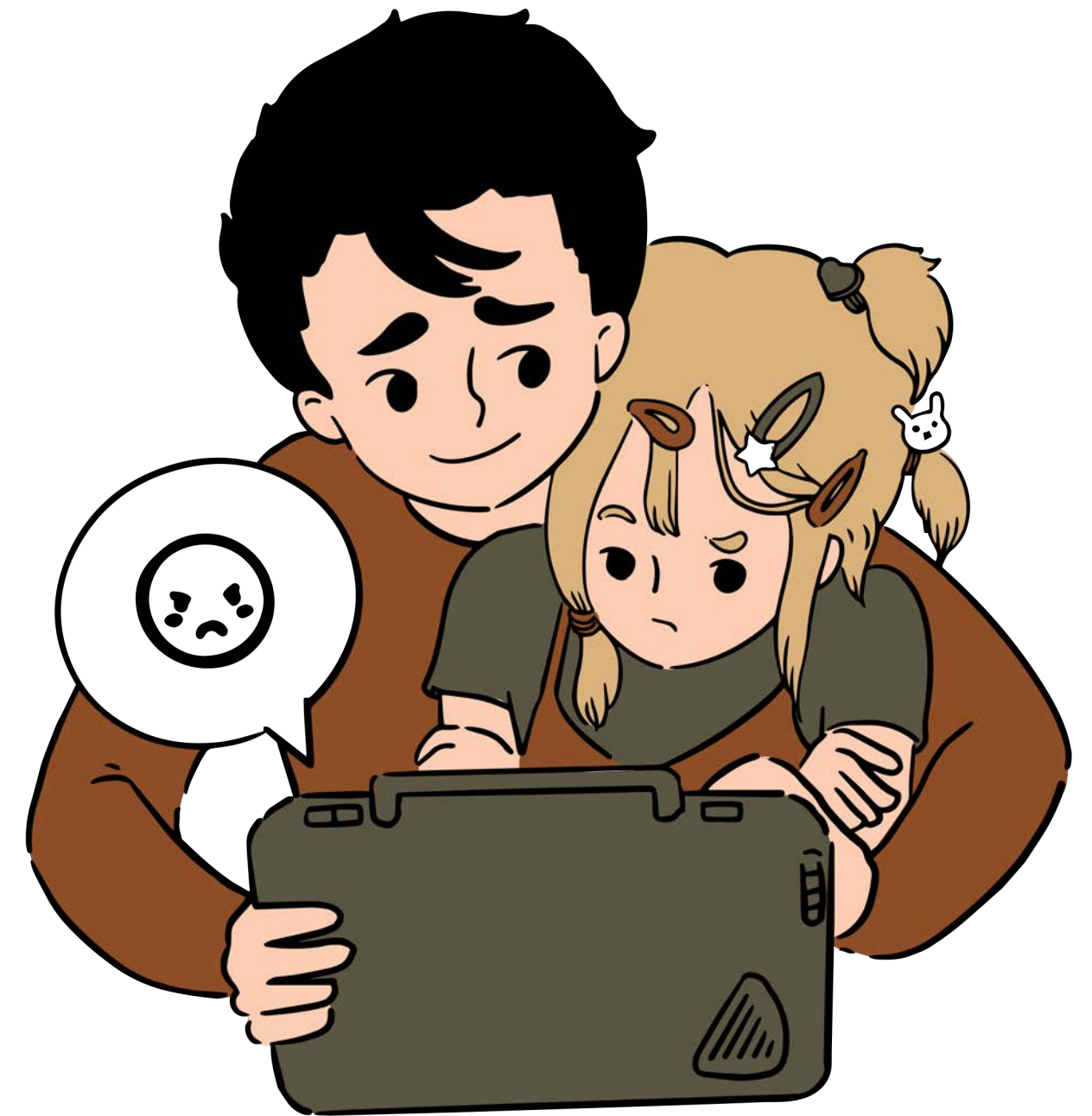
My Voice, My Choice

If they don't have access to their AAC system when they go shopping – then they can't choose who to communicate with at the shops – and, again, we are taking that decision away from them.

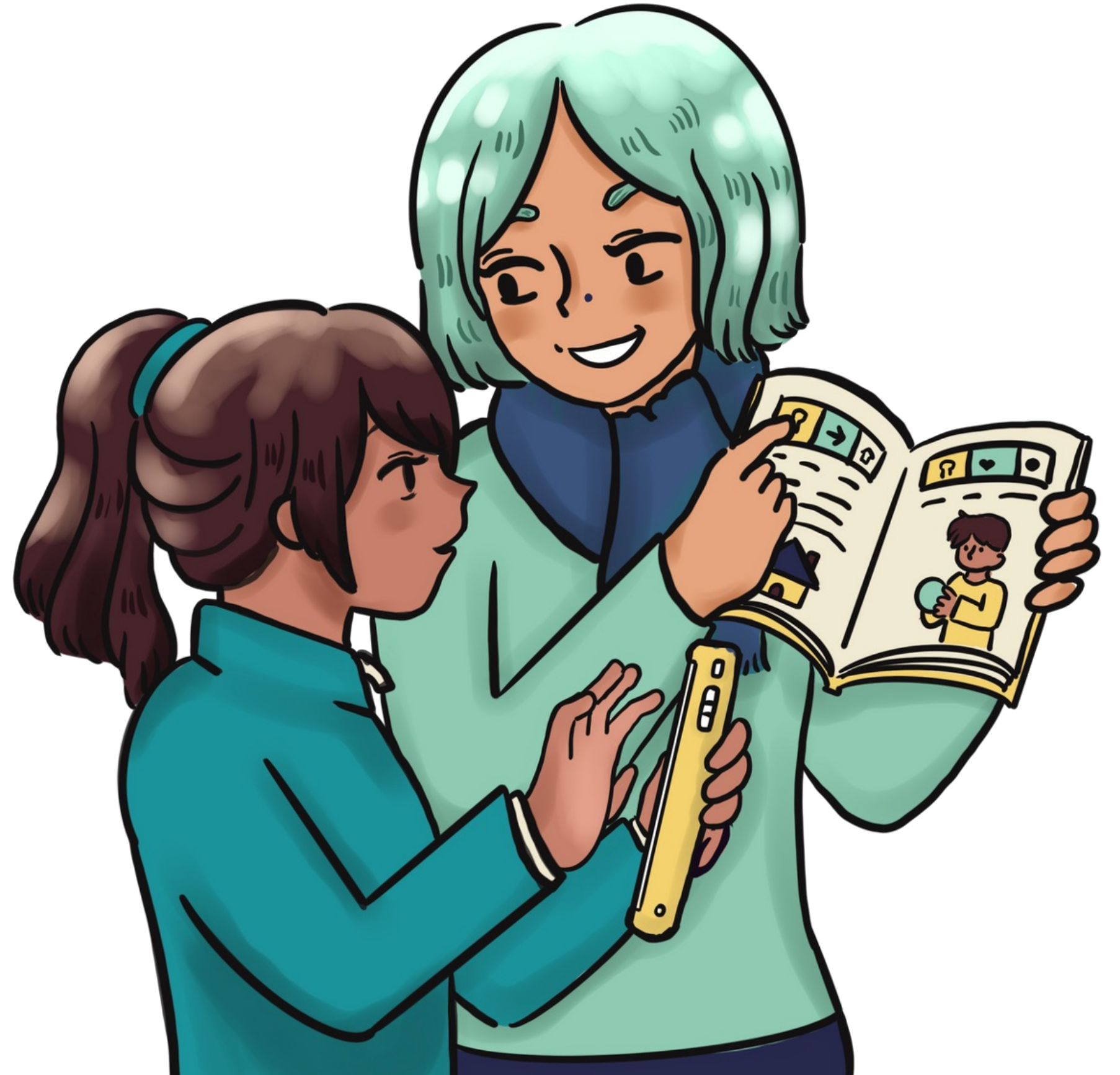


My Voice is Important

And by not having their AAC system, in any environment, we are sending a message that their communication isn't that important, which makes it hard for them to develop communication autonomy.



**"Whenever
I want to
say it"**



My Voice, My Choice

Again, this seems obvious. There are times we don't want to chat with others - and there are times we want to have a big conversation.

Once again, communication autonomy is about the individual making this decision.

If their AAC system is with them, everywhere they go, then they can choose when they want to talk - and when they don't.

If we don't make sure that they have an AAC system in every situation, then we are taking their autonomy away from them.



**"However, I
choose to
say it"**



My Voice

The final part is also about having access to the language you need to get your message across.

If you go to the football and you choose to insult the umpire – you want to make the insult appropriate.

A customised and personalised AAC system will let you say the insult of your choice – if you have it with you of course!



My Words



It's also important to realise that communication autonomy doesn't have to involve complete sentences.

You can simply say "stop" or "more" to get your message across.

What is more important, is that every individual has a customised system available to them at all time - so that they can say what they want to, however they choose to say it.



The End of the Journey

The end of the journey is an autonomous communicator.

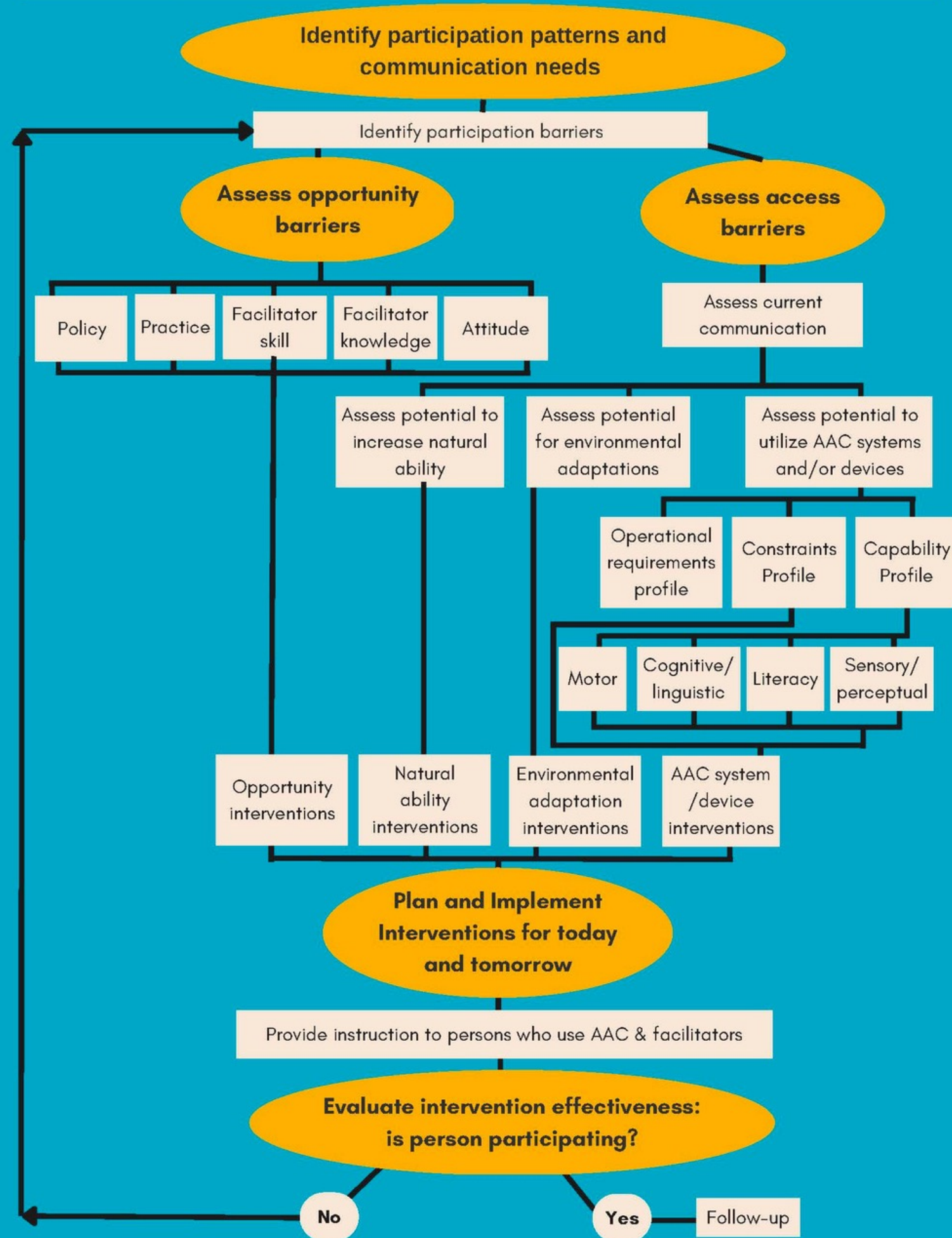
They own their own AAC system.

Their system has been customized for them.

It goes everywhere with them (it's their voice).

They can use it to say what they want to say, to whoever they want to say it, whenever they want to say it, however they choose to say it.

The Participation Model for Augmentative and Alternative Communication
From Beukelman, D. R., & Mirenda, P. (2013). Augmentative and alternative communication: Supporting children and adults with complex communication needs. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.



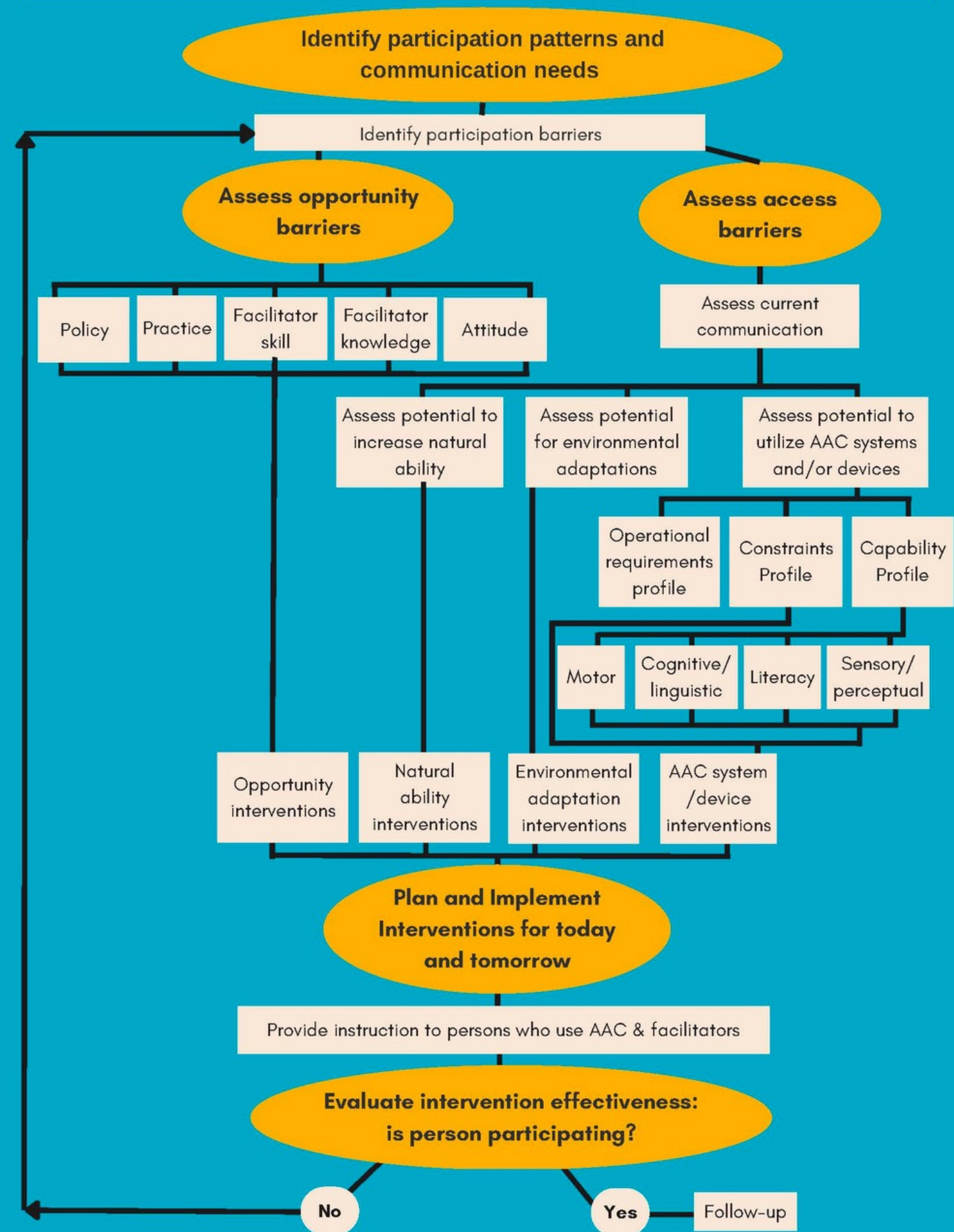
Now Let's Talk About the Journey

The Participation Model

A model of AAC assessment and provision.

Begins by identifying the individual's communication needs (all day, every day) and then moves onto other categories.

Beukelman & Mirenda (2013)





No Prerequisites

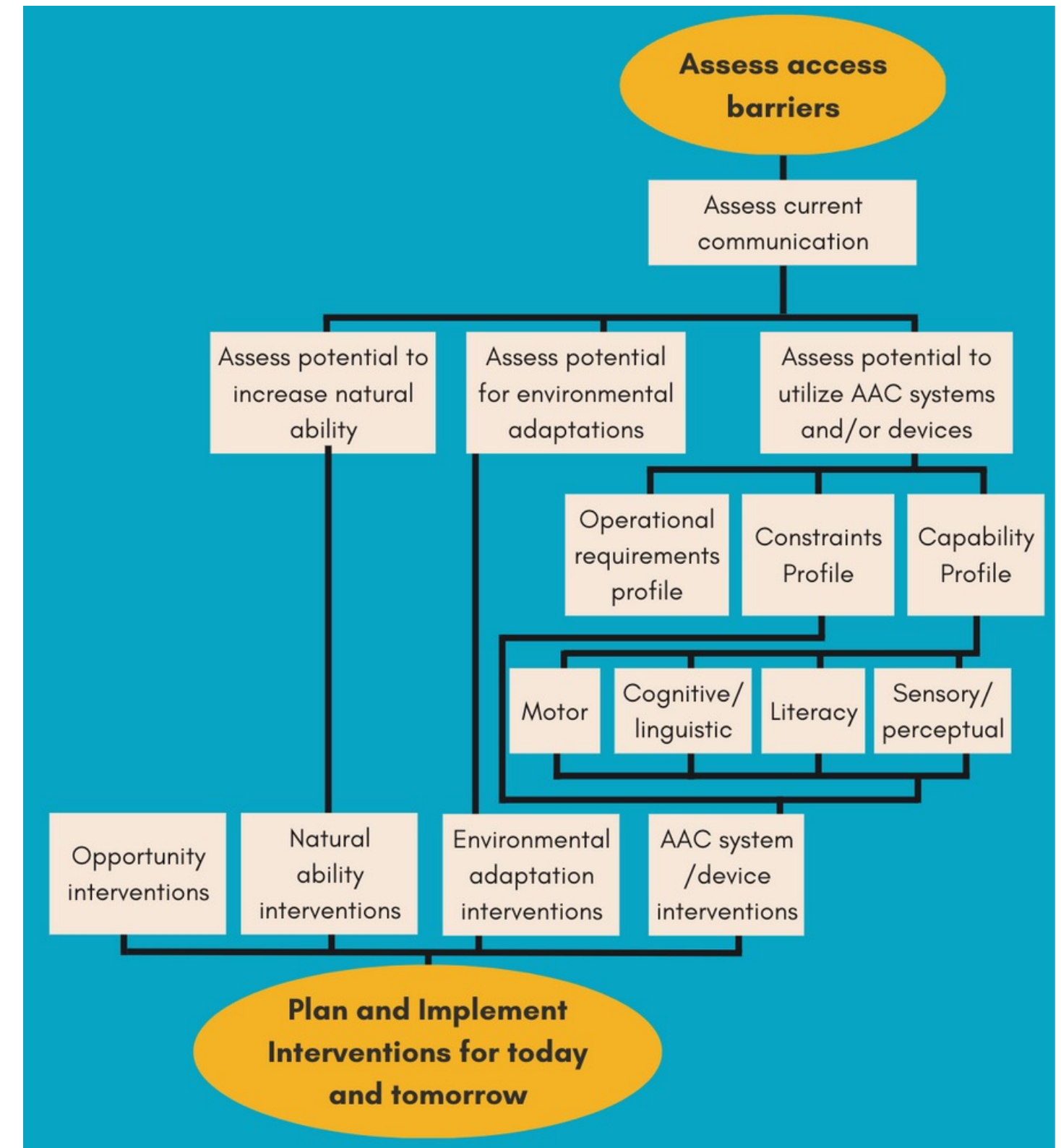
There are no basic prerequisites to communication beyond being conscious. Likewise, there are no prerequisites to AAC.

Augmentative Communication and Early Intervention. Myths and Realities,
(Ronski and Sevcik 2005)

Assess Access Barriers

In my experience this is where AAC assessments tend to focus - it's certainly where I focused when I began working in AAC.

The Participation Model is Dynamic Assessment, which is best practice.



Dynamic Assessment



The population of individuals who use AAC is very diverse (e.g., individuals with autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, apraxia, etc.)

Therefore, to find an individualised language system, dynamic assessment should be used.

Dynamic assessment seeks to identify the skills that an individual possesses as well as their learning potential (www.asha.org).

A dynamic assessment should include active client and clinician/assessor participation, modification of assessments as needed, and should be fluid and responsive.

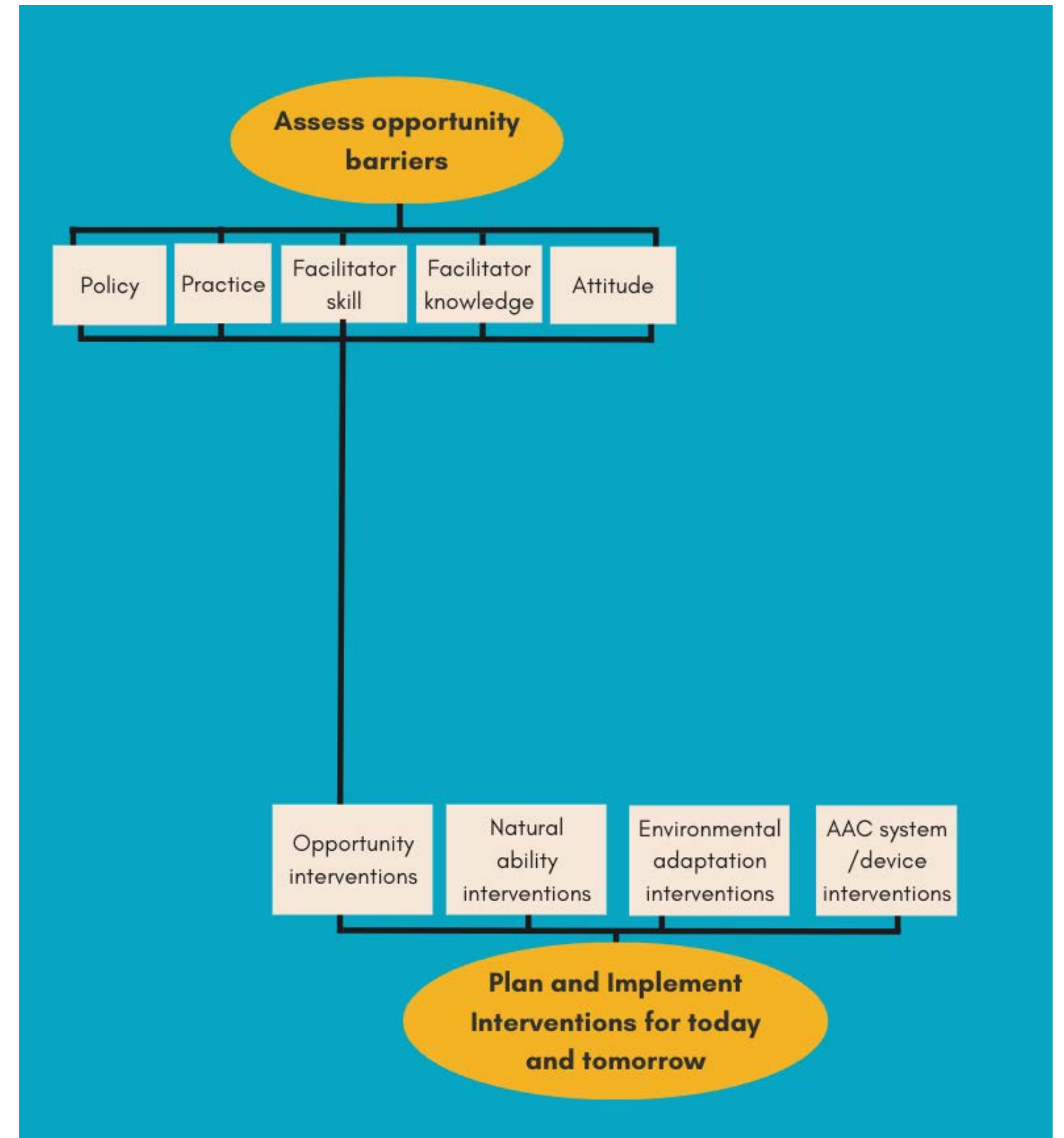
It is a highly interactive process that should adapt to the preferences and communicative needs of the client.

Assess Opportunity Barriers

These are broader areas - and tend to be less of a focus in AAC Assessments.

However, they have a huge impact on AAC success.

As I have become more experienced, these have had just as much of my focus as Access Barriers.



Policy & Practice Barriers

Policy: legislated or regulated
procedures.

Practice: procedures or conventions that
are common practice but are not actual
policies.



Facilitator Skill & Facilitator Knowledge

Becoming a good communication partner is critical for the individual(s) you are working with.

They need you to know how to model AAC with their system.

If they are a beginning communicator, they need you to use strategies such as verbal referencing to help them learn how to communicate in ways other than behaviour, facial expression and body language.

If they are already using AAC then we need to help them to learn all the different ways in which they can use it.

And these apply to everyone who is a regular communication partner - we all need to be involved in their communication journey.

The people around every individual with Complex Communication Needs, must believe in their ability to learn language.

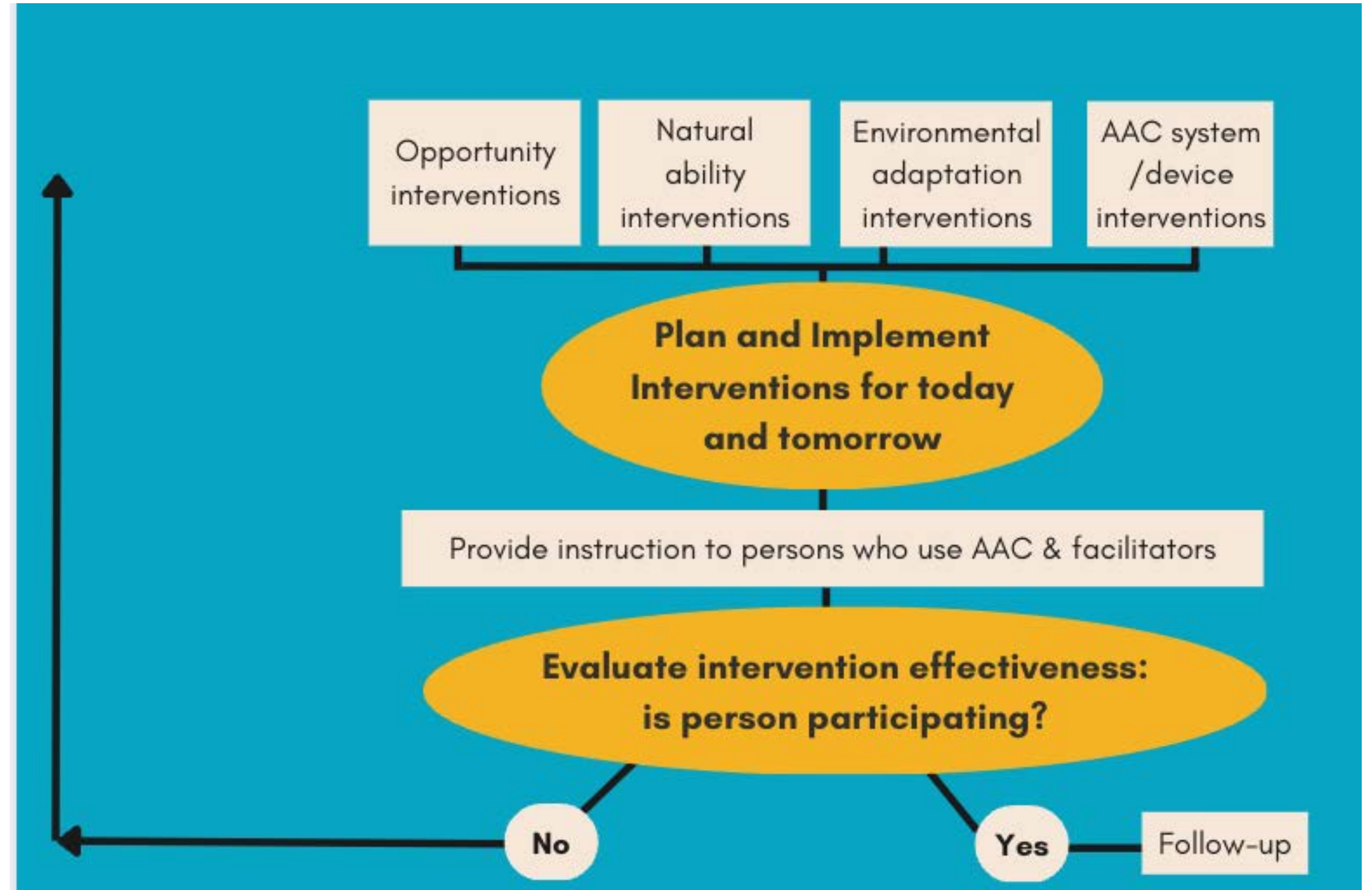
We also need to understand that our role is to implement aided language input and other forms of language and communication teaching and learning for them to progress.

Then we need to show our positive attitudes and our belief as we attribute meaning to their first communication attempts and as we continue to support and encourage them as they move to more and more complex systems.

ATTITUDE



The road to autonomous communication involves planning and implementing for "today" and "tomorrow" - and then reviewing!



The Journey Continues - Let's Travel the Road Together

