

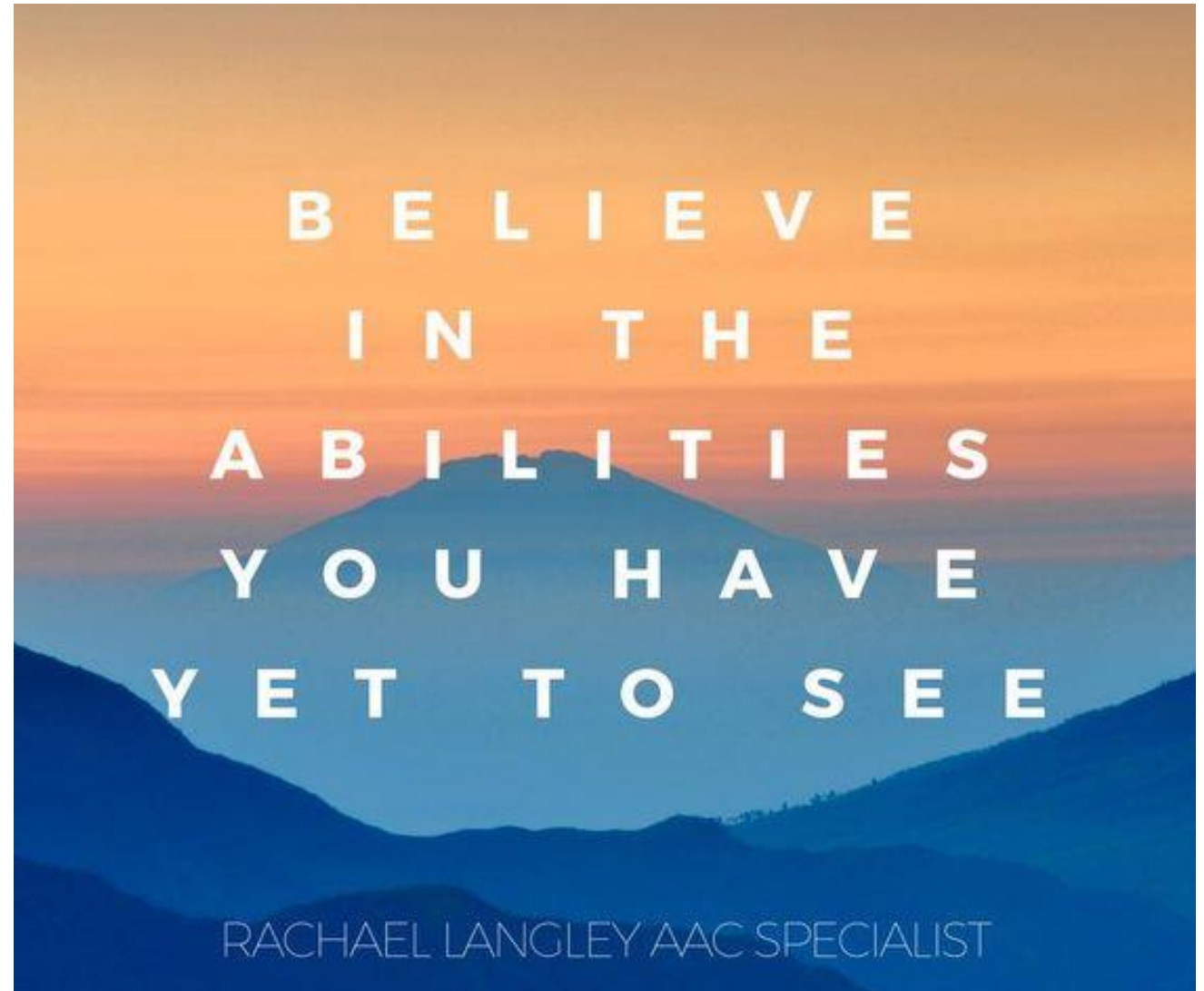
# Communication: The Sky's the Limit



**Jane Farrall**  
**CONSULTING**  
Literacy - AAC - Assistive Technology

The attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of communication partners are pivotal in the success story of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). The people around every individual with complex communication needs must believe that everyone has a right to communicate.

(Farrall, 2014)



# Communication Bill of Rights

The Communication Bill of Rights asserts the basic rights of people to affect, through communication, the conditions of their existence. All people have specific communication rights in their daily interactions. These rights are summarized from the Communication Bill of Rights put forward in 1992 by the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities.

(Quality Standard for AAC Services, Communication Matters, 2012)

**Communication Bill of Rights**

I have the right:

The diagram consists of 14 panels, each with a title and an illustration:

- to be given real choices**: A stick figure points to three colored blocks (blue, green, red).
- to say no, refuse and reject choices**: A stick figure with a sad face and hands held out in refusal.
- to ask for what I want**: A stick figure points to a red block.
- to share my feelings**: Four faces showing different emotions: sad, angry, happy, and neutral.
- to be heard and responded to (even if the answer is no)**: Two faces talking, with speech bubbles.
- to ask for and get attention and interaction**: A face with a dotted line extending from its mouth, indicating a call for attention.
- to have and use my speech system all the time**: A face using a communication board, with a clock below it.
- ask and know about my schedule and world**: A schedule card with the following text:
 

SCHEDULE	
1.	bus
2.	reading
3.	math
4.	lunch
5.	recess
- to be taught how to communicate**: Two faces, one using a communication board, with a green board labeled 'ABC' in the background.
- to have my speech system in working order and to have a back up**: A communication board with a laptop icon next to it.
- to be a full and equal member of my community**: Three people sitting at desks in a classroom setting.
- to be treated with respect and dignity**: Two faces, one with a hand on the other's shoulder.
- to be spoken with, not about**: Two faces talking, with a speech bubble containing the words 'talk talk'.
- to be communicated with in a sensitive manner**: A yellow duck with a speech bubble.

From the National Joint Committee for the Communicative Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities. (1992).  
 for meeting the communication needs of persons with severe disabilities. *Asha*, 34(Suppl. 7), 2-3. adapted by K. A

“Two sets of AAC-related decisions should be made from the outset: those aimed at “today” and those aimed at “tomorrow”.

(Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013)

Key areas for the successful implementation of an AAC system include modelling utterance, training, communication partners, role models and on-going support.

(Quality Standard for AAC Services, Communication Matters, 2012)

Good practice in AAC

# How should we deliver AAC Services?

Provision of AAC services is within the scope of practice of speech-language pathologists (ASHA, 2001). The speech-language pathologist (SLP) who is practicing within the area of AAC shall:

- Recognize and hold paramount the needs and interests of individuals who may benefit from AAC and assist them to communicate in ways they desire.
- Implement a multimodal approach to enhance effective communication that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Acquire and maintain the knowledge and skills (ASHA, 2002) that are necessary to provide quality professional services.
- Integrate perspectives, knowledge and skills of team members, especially those individuals who have AAC needs, their families, and significant others in developing functional and meaningful goals and objectives.
- Assess, intervene, and evaluate progress and outcomes associated with AAC interventions using principles of evidence-based practice.
- Facilitate individuals' uses of AAC to promote and maintain their quality of life.
- Advocate with and for individuals who can or already do benefit from AAC, their families, and significant others to address communication needs and ensuring rights to full communication access.

(American Speech and Hearing Association, 2005)

# Communication is a Human Right

- The place of “communication” in human rights is usually seen in light of Article 19 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR), which states that everyone has a “right to freedom of opinion and expression”, including the right “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”. Article 19 of the UDHR protects the right to express opinions and communicate information and ideas in different ways. This statement implies that all people have the right *to be able to communicate*.
- International Communication Project, retrieved from <https://internationalcommunicationproject.com/profile/communication-basic-human-right/> on 6 October 2019

# Our Agenda and Beliefs



We must provide every individual with complex communication needs with a communication system that enables their right to communicate.



We must believe in their ability to use language and give them a system that enables them to develop and use language.



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The people around every AAC user must believe in their ability to learn language.

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We need to implement aided language input and other forms of language/communication teaching and learning to build language and work towards "tomorrow".

Our role

Then we need to demonstrate our positive attitudes and our belief in every AAC user as we attribute meaning to their first communication attempts.....

.....and continue to support and encourage them as they move to more and more complex systems.



If we “do not have the skills and commitment required to provide supports for AAC system use, abandonment of the system is likely”.  
(Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013)



# Let's join the revolution!

- The history of Angelman Syndrome and implementing AAC is clouded by a sea of assumptions!
- All individuals with Angelman Syndrome need access to AAC
- This implementation should reflect our best knowledge and practice – unfortunately this doesn't always happen
- Instead there is an assumption that many people with Angelman Syndrome cannot learn to use AAC
- The Angelman Revolution is changing that – let's join the revolution!!

# Use the participation model as your guide

- The participation model provides a framework for assessment and intervention. The aim is to enhance a person's wellbeing and their ability to participate in the community. The outcomes include developing communication strategies focusing on the individual's present and future communication needs.
- Keep today AND tomorrow in your plans.

# System for today System for tomorrow



Initial assessment for today looking at current communication needs/abilities;



Detailed assessment for tomorrow identifying communication systems that will support the user in new communication environments into the future;



Follow up assessment to maintain a comprehensive system to meet the changing capabilities and lifestyle of the individual.

# Engineering The Environment

- Communication is never just about the individual. AAC implementation should never be just about the individual either.
- Speech Language Therapists and other professionals are taught to see our interventions as being focused on the client and the individual, but we need to move beyond this. Until we work on and with the whole environment, AAC will not be as successful.

- As a young speech language therapist I assessed each individual client I worked with. I developed and recommended AAC systems and worked in classrooms or day centres to get those systems in use.





[CREATIVESPEECHLAB.COM/HEARMYVOICE](https://creativespeechlab.com/hearmyvoice)

creative SPEECH LAB  
#HEARMYVOICE

- More than once this implementation fell over – the AAC system stayed in the cupboard for most of the week.
- I started to identify a new syndrome that I called “speech therapist syndrome” – which involved the use of AAC only when a speech language therapist was near.

**YOUR CHILD  
IS ALREADY A  
COMMUNICATOR**

**YOUR CHILD  
HAS HIS/HER  
OWN NATURAL  
LANGUAGE**

**YOUR CHILD  
WILL NEED SYMBOLIC  
LANGUAGE TO EXPRESS:  
THOUGHTS,  
EMOTIONS,  
DESIRES,  
AND IDEAS**

**- MARY-LOUISE BERTRAM**



**ANGELMANACADEMY.ORG**

Looking back I can see clearly that where AAC was successful it was because of the environment around that user – more frequently because of some of incredible people in that environment:

Parents who knew the principle of “the least dangerous assumption” (Donnellan, 1984) by instinct and who willingly put it in practice while teaching me about making communication “all day every day”;

Teachers who worked to teach me and their students how to use (and create) communication opportunities in the classroom;

And the many wonderful AAC learners themselves who taught me to more than I can say.



Celebrate

These days I have a much higher success rate  
with AAC implementation

(and the incidence of speech therapist  
syndrome is greatly decreased!).

I continue to do the traditional Speech Language Therapist roles.

I get to know the individual.

I do traditional and dynamic assessment.

I recommend and customise a good, comprehensive AAC system e.g. PODD or core vocabulary.

I make sure that the system works and is updated as needed.

I continue to plan for "tomorrow".





But the difference now is that right from the beginning my intervention also focuses on the environment and the systems around the individual.

# So how do we do this?

## DO's and DON'Ts of AAC

- ✓ Do use the AAC system to talk yourself
- ✓ Do aim high
- ✓ Do use a well designed, comprehensive vocabulary e.g. core vocabulary or PODD
- ✓ Do provide enough wait time
- ✓ Do ask open ended questions
- ✓ Do focus on key words when modelling
- ✓ Do respect multi-modal communication
- ✓ Do allow exploration and access to the whole vocabulary
- ✓ Do make sure AAC is available all day, every day
- ✓ Do describe what you want to say using core words
- ✗ Don't expect the AAC user to communicate without you modelling how
- ✗ Don't demand prerequisite skills
- ✗ Don't provide an AAC system with only a handful of choices
- ✗ Don't do all the talking
- ✗ Don't ask questions the AAC user knows you already know the answer to
- ✗ Don't think you need to always model grammatically complete sentences
- ✗ Don't say "And now say it on your talker"
- ✗ Don't create custom pages for specific activities
- ✗ Don't limit access to the AAC system
- ✗ Don't focus on adding lots of vocabulary



We're aiming for  
Communicative  
Competence

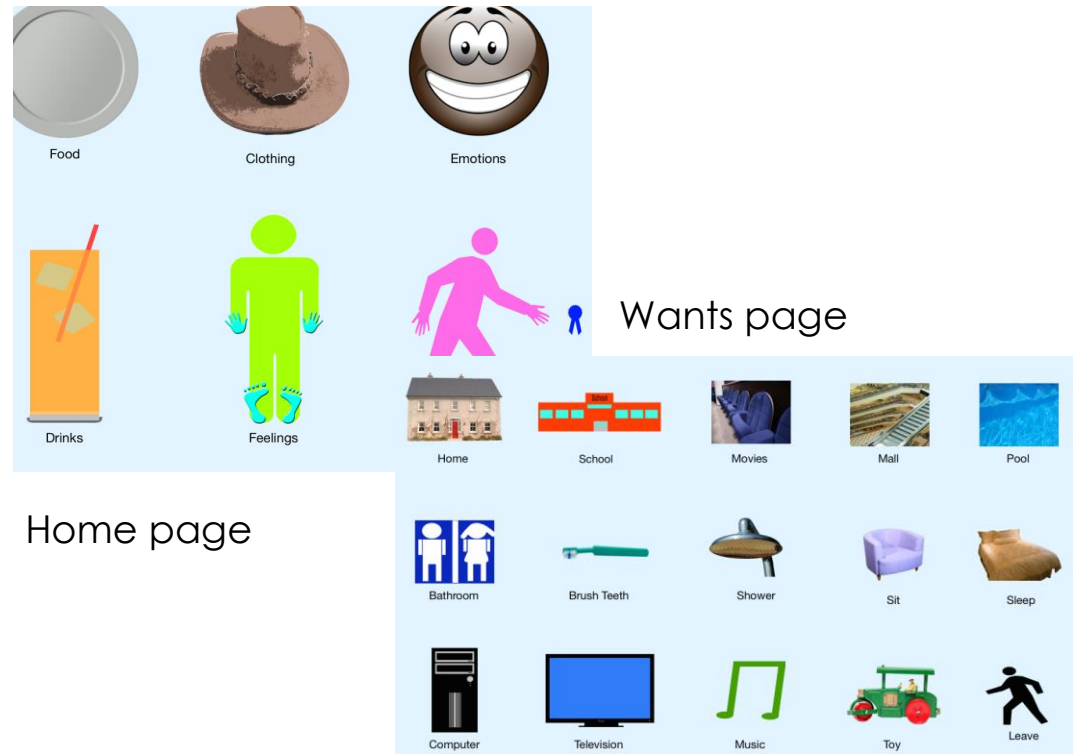
(Light, 1989; Light & McNaughton,  
2014)

First - the Don'ts!



- Don't expect the AAC user to communicate without you modelling how
- Don't demand prerequisite skills
- Don't provide an AAC system with only a handful of choices
- Don't do all the talking
- Don't ask questions the AAC user knows you already know the answer to
- Don't think you need to always model grammatically complete sentences
- Don't say "And now say it on your talker"
- Don't create custom pages for specific activities
- Don't limit access to the AAC system
- Don't focus on adding lots of vocabulary

Learn more: [www.assistiveware.com/aac-do-dont](http://www.assistiveware.com/aac-do-dont)



Too Many Nouns!

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“My daughter was started with a BIGmack and advanced to a Go Talk 4+, with the idea she might advance further to a Go Talk 20 and maybe one day, if all the stars aligned and she was a very good girl, a DynaVox. Nothing about this changing technology supported her to build a foundation of language development.”

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Erin Sheldon, QIAT Listserve, 21/03/2013

No prerequisites

# Rethinking our own practices

- “WE USED TO THINK: Start with just a few (4-6) picture symbols and add a few more at a time, as the student with ASD shows that he or she can communicate appropriately with them usually by requesting.”
- “NOW WE THINK: Really? Where is the research that defends this practice? This is certainly not how other kids learn new words and acquire language”
- Professor Pat Mirenda, ISAAC Portugal 2014

# Counter-productive practices

- Use the AAC system to quiz or test
- Ask questions the AAC user knows you already know the answer to
- Reward communication with food
- Require the AAC user to say it ALSO with “their words”

Don't use  
AAC for  
"testing"



AAC TIP

Teach

- DON'T -

TEST



Blossom  
Speech Therapy

Second – the Dos!



- Do use the AAC system to talk yourself
- Do aim high
- Do use a well designed, comprehensive vocabulary e.g. core vocabulary or PODD
- Do provide enough wait time
- Do ask open ended questions
- Do focus on key words when modelling
- Do respect multi-modal communication
- Do allow exploration and access to the whole vocabulary
- Do make sure AAC is available all day, every day
- Do describe what you want to say using core words

Learn more: [www.assistiveware.com/aac-do-dont](http://www.assistiveware.com/aac-do-dont)

# AAC Success

- Factors impacting long-term success
- Person who uses AAC system experiences success 91.76%
- Degree to which the system is valued by the user and partners as a means of communication 90.58%
- System serves a variety of communicative functions 89.85%
- System is used for communication, not just as a toy or therapy tool (Real communication) 87.20%
- Other areas:
  - Appropriate device selected
  - Support for system
- Johnson, et al. (2006)

- Has a range of language;
- Supports the user to develop linguistic competency;
- Can be used for aided language stimulation throughout the day;
- Can be used to communicate throughout the day;
- Can be used for a range of communicative functions;
- Supports the user to develop communication autonomy.

A good comprehensive AAC system

# Build a supportive AAC environment

- Provide the parents and teachers/staff with a copy of the student's communication system;
- Explain how the system works;
- Practice using the system;
- Help them to understand they are absolutely pivotal in the success of the system;
- Teach them about aided language input;
- Remind them communication happens all day, every day;
- Ask them to make sure that the individual's system is available everywhere they go.

# Build a supportive AAC environment

- Give the communication partners small targets.
- In core vocabulary - give them specific core words to practice and use;
- Use A Year of Core Words from PrAACtical AAC as a pattern;
- Model to them HOW you want them to model. Don't ask others to do something you can't do yourself!
- Make sure those small targets happen throughout the day. Don't let AAC become something that happens at specific times.

- Give the communication partners small targets.
- In PODD - give them specific pathways to practice and use;
- Start with the front two chat pages, then extend to other pathways. Add a pathway a week or a month - judge how fast you can add them;
- Model to them HOW you want them to model. Don't ask others to do something you can't do yourself!
- Make sure those small targets happen throughout the day. Don't let AAC become something that happens at specific times.

Build a  
supportive  
AAC  
environment

# Aided Language Stimulation is Key

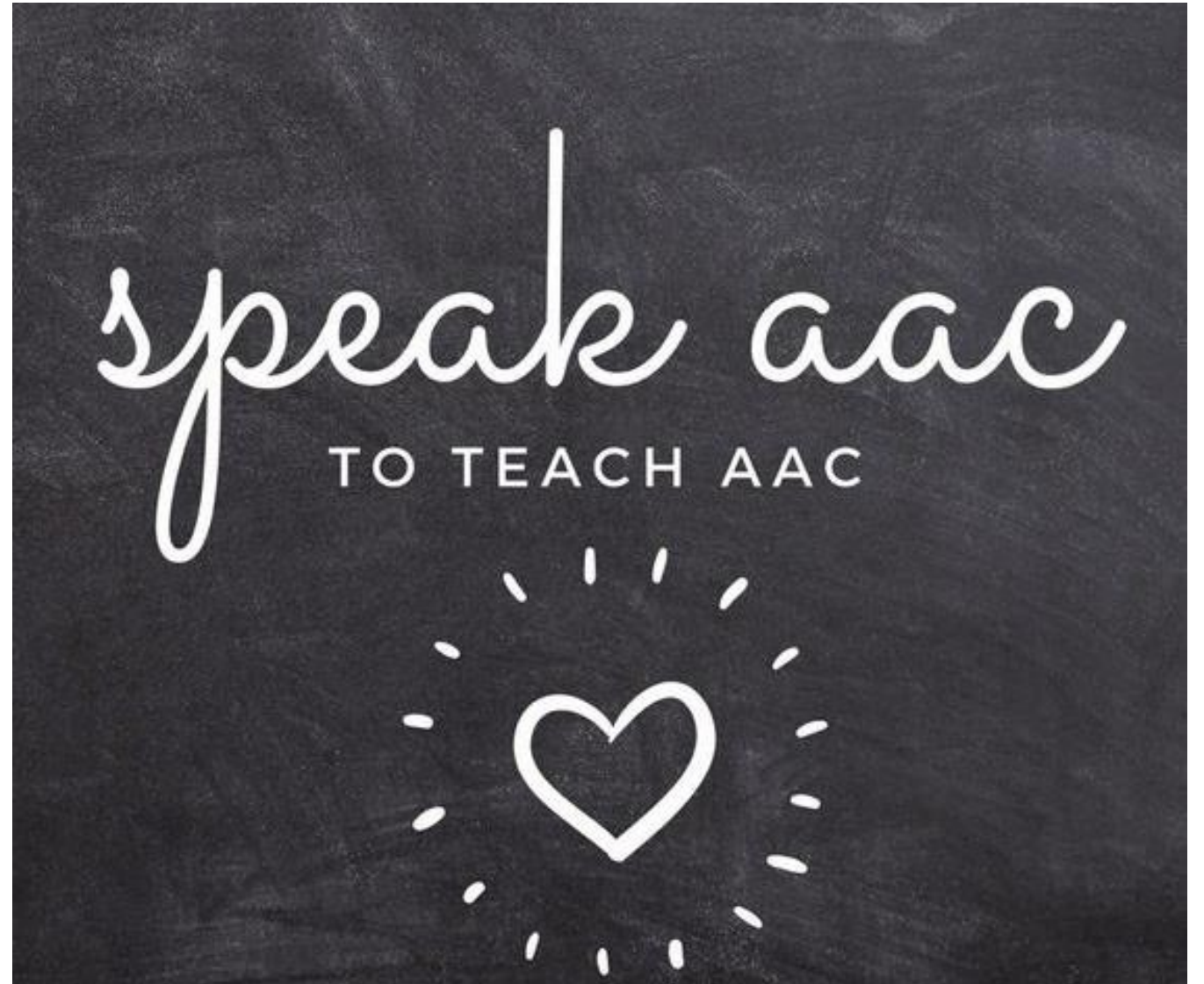
- Remind everyone that practice is the key to aided language stimulation.
- Talk about how you practiced to become fluent.
- Support others to practice.
- Reinforce that this is everyone's responsibility!

# Build a supportive AAC environment

- Constantly increase targets and expectations as peoples' skills, beliefs and understandings grow.
- Use videos of AAC users to show them where this journey is taking us.
- Use visual tools to remind people of the importance of this journey.



Use visual tools to remind people of the importance of this journey.





**Take the First Step**  
Aided Language Stimulation

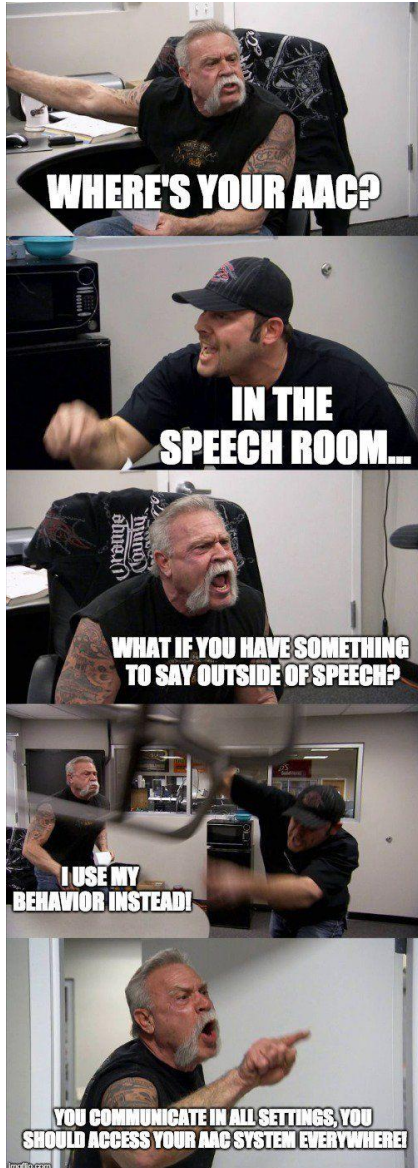
©susannebernowitz 2015

**Your AAC Teaching Roadmap**

<http://kidzlearnlanguage.blogspot.com>

**AAC**  
**IS NOT A LADDER**  
WHERE A CHILD MUST  
STEP ON EVERY RUNG;  
**IT IS A SEED**  
THAT MUST BE  
CARED FOR AND  
NURTURED TO  
**GROW**

-KATE AHERN, M.S.ED.  
ANGELMANACADEMY.ORG





## The Myths of AAC



AAC is NOT only for nonverbal kids



**There are NO prerequisites for using AAC**



You do NOT need to try static before moving to dynamic display



NO one is too young for AAC



There is NO hierarchy of visuals




AAC will NOT hinder speech; it WILL enhance it

## YOU ARE A COMMUNICATION COACH

### SUPPORTING LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH AAC

You bring a plan, you watch,  
you teach, and you cheer.  
Sometimes you see the successes,  
sometimes you see the messes.  
But you're there for it all.  
Good job, Coach!

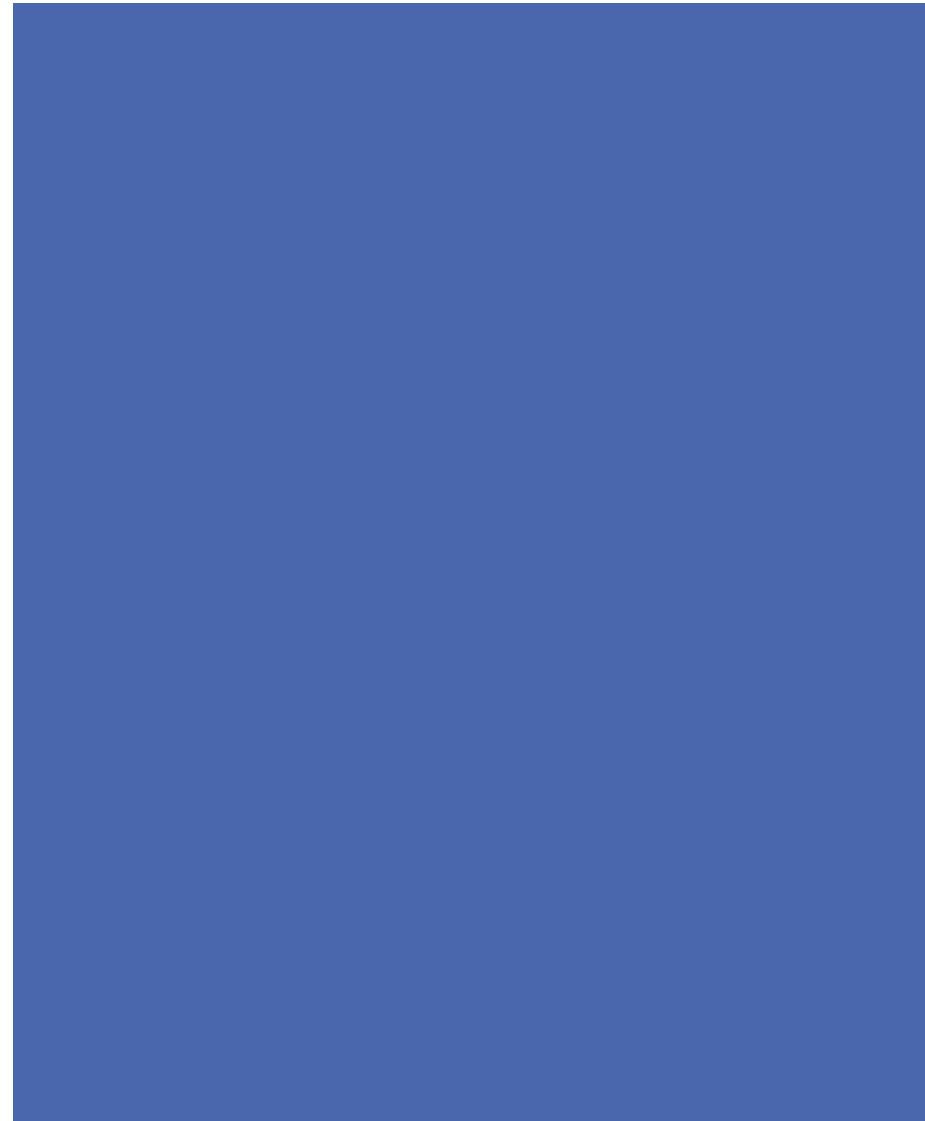
RACHAEL LANGLEY - AAC SPECIALIST



NOT BEING ABLE TO  
SPEAK IS NOT THE SAME  
AS NOT HAVING  
ANYTHING TO SAY.

[www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com)

Removing the Stumbling Block



**JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN'T SPEAK**



**DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T WIN  
BRITAIN'S GOT TALENT!**

© Richard Thomas / Rex USA / Shutterstock

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# The Periodic Table of AAC

Green = Guiding Beliefs  
 Orange = AAC Competencies  
 Pink = Instructional and Implementation Tips  
 Yellow = Communication Functions  
 Purple = Adult Support Tips  
 Blue = Assessment Considerations

model	recast	create opportunity	motivate	sabotage											presume competence		
start early	core words	add language stimulation	multi-modal	language rich environment	seize the moment	environmental teaching	direct instruction	fast talk options	avoid making AAC work	promote social skills	make primary purpose connection	AAC mentor	AAC social group	AAC for leisure	AAC taught in community	AAC use at home	teach literacy
way to ask for additions	way to say its not here	spelling available	age appropriate	visual supports	positive behavior supports	stories about users life	color coded	changes as needed	make fun part of the plan	create a reason to use AAC	all behavior is communication	use prompt hierarchy	promote self generated language	allow communication directly to caregivers	no one is a mind reader	keep an AAC quote book	pre-teach
comment	greet and take leave	ask	initiate	direct	argue	avoid trouble	answer	share information	social closeness	make real choices	express emotions	refuse	gain attention	protest	label name	power	say what is thought
use tech support	get online training	go to workshops	rely on your vendor	prepare for transition	no end to support	train peers	ongoing programming	train staff	train family	back it up!							
				vision?	hearing?	motor skills?	fast enough?	cognitive needs?	switch access?	eye gaze?	touch screen?	photo album?	camera?	mouse?	joystick?	music player?	internet access?
				size?	symbol set?	cost?	low tech?	mid tech?	high tech?	sentence building?	dynamic display?	mispelak?	user preference	funding	room to grow	feature matching	family involvement






























# AAC BOOT CAMP



## Getting AAC Users COMMUNICATING

regardless of AAC system used (no tech, low tech, high tech) or skill level...

 <b>DON'T do this.....</b>	 <b>DO this.....</b>
 <b>DON'T</b> expect a user to know how to communicate w/o direct models & instruction	 <b>MODEL MODEL MODEL</b> <i>model expected communication behaviors BEFORE expecting to see those behaviors from the user</i>
 <b>DON'T</b> do ALL the talking	 <b>PRESUME COMPETENCE</b>
 <b>DON'T</b> overprompt	 <b>FOLLOW</b> prompt hierarchy
 <b>DON'T</b> teach ONLY requesting	 <b>TEACH</b> language functions including directing, commenting, requesting assistance, etc...
 <b>DON'T</b> re-prompt too quickly	 <b>WAIT</b> 10-20 sec. (w/an expectant look) before re-prompting!! <i>Count in your head!!</i> 
 <b>DON'T</b> provide ONLY nouns	 <b>PROVIDE CORE WORDS</b> <i>including verbs &amp; describing words (in addition to nouns)</i>
 <b>DON'T</b> focus on vocabulary that won't be functional/used tomorrow	 <b>COLOR CODE</b> parts of speech
 <b>DON'T</b> remove the device	 <b>KEEP</b> icon placement constant <i>keep repeated icons in the same location on each page/screen</i>
 <b>DON'T</b> move symbols	 <b>ALLOW</b> user time to explore and learn the system
 <b>DON'T</b> stop all "babbling" (exploring, button pressing)	 <b>MAKE AAC</b> available at all times
 <b>DON'T</b> keep the AAC system in their desk, cubbie, or backpack	 <b>PROVIDE</b> Aided Language Input
 <b>DON'T</b> expect sentences right away	 <b>ASK</b> open-ended questions



And  
reinforce  
how  
important  
Aided  
Language  
Stimulation  
is!

- It is critical for an individual to not only have symbols, but also to have experience with those symbols in a symbol rich environment / print rich environment.
- The typically developing child will have been exposed to oral language for approximately 4,380 waking hours by the time he begins speaking at about 18 months of age.

- If someone is using a different symbol set and only has exposure to it two times a week, for 20 – 30 minutes each, it will take the alternate symbol user 84 years to have the same experience with his symbols that the typically developing child has with the spoken word in 18 months!!!

- The typically developing child will demonstrate language competency around 9 – 12 years of age having been immersed in and practicing oral language for approximately 36,500 waking hours.
- For 9 – 12 years that child has been using and receiving corrective feedback while practicing with the spoken word.

- At twice a week, 20 – 30 minutes each time, it will take the alternate symbol user 701 years to have the same experience.
- (Retrieved from QIAT Listserv, April 3 2011)

This is what  
we're  
aiming for



# Communication:

By putting in place good practice, implementing a robust AAC system, engineering the environment and being great communication partners, we can work together towards tomorrow. And with those.....

## The Sky's The Limit

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