

Strategies to Increase Success for AAC Users, Including Students with ASD (Musselwhite, 2008)

Start Early . . . and We Mean EARLY!!!

Cheslock, Ronski, & Sevcik (2007) summarize the evidence on early intervention in AAC, noting that ‘Beginning intervention as early as possible will not only improve the life and functioning of a child but will also reduce the stress of the family and in turn improve the family environment (Guralnick, 2000).’ Recent research at the University of Washington highlights the importance of very early intervention in supporting language learning (Kuhl et al, 2005; Schwartz, 2007). While many of us are working with students who are NOT toddlers, we can all participate in advocating for early, intensive intervention, that includes AAC and Aided Language Stimulation. As Cafiero says, ‘For people of all ages on the autism spectrum, whether they have had some or no prior experience with AAC, now is always the right time to start.’ (2005, p. 13).

Prompt Lightly

Facilitators should prompt students ONLY when necessary, and should prompt quietly. The facilitator should not call out a verbal prompt, as that is essentially stealing the student’s turn! Only the AAC user being prompted should hear or see the prompt. Use a ‘least-to-most’ hierarchy of prompting, as shown in the chart below:

Prompt	Description	Example
<i>Expectant Delay</i>	Give a verbal cue then pause to give students time to process the information, consider a response, access the device, etc. Pause <u>at least</u> 5 seconds.	“Okay, <u>Jarrad</u> said he might feel BORED when he’s working. Hmmm, wonder what other feelings we could put on our chart” <pause and look expectant>
<i>Verbal Prompt</i>	Give a subtle verbal cue, that tells generally WHAT to do	“Jen. Here’s your switch . . . Jen’s going to READ for us!” <i>Note: do NOT say ‘hit your switch’</i>
<i>Light Cue – general</i>	Use a squeeze light to give students a hint of the location of the target vocabulary item.	Students have been asked to share feelings. After a pause, Kelly’s facilitator flashes the light in the vicinity of the FEELINGS symbol.
<i>Light Cue - Intermittent</i>	Use a squeeze light to briefly indicate the target item.	Flash and release on the FEELINGS symbol.
<i>Light Cue – Constant</i>	Use a squeeze light to indicate the target item.	Flash and hold (or wiggle) the light on the FEELINGS symbol.
<i>Visual Model</i>	Show student an icon card that s/he can match to cue device use.	Hold up symbol card for MAD. Show symbols on device as needed.

Note: This chart does NOT include hand-over-hand prompting. Whenever possible, use less intrusive prompts. If physical prompting is required consider these options:

- touch bony structures instead of flesh, to avoid tactile defensiveness, muscle contraction
- prompt distally (that is, first touch the shoulder or elbow, instead of the hand)
- use **hand-under-hand** so that the student sees his or her hand, NOT yours

Smart Charts for Prompting!

Print, Glue to Tagboard, Laminate & Affix to Device, Keychain Light, or Wall

Prompt	Description	Example
<i>Expectant Delay</i>	Give a verbal cue then pause to give students time to process the information, consider a response, access the device, etc. Pause at <u>least</u> 5 seconds.	“Okay, <u>Jarrad</u> said he might feel BORED when he’s working. Hmmm, wonder what other feelings we could put on our chart” <pause and look expectant>
<i>Verbal Prompt</i>	Give a subtle verbal cue, that tells generally WHAT to do	“Jen. Here’s your switch . . . Jen’s going to READ for us!” <i>Note: do NOT say ‘hit your switch’</i>
<i>Light Cue – general</i>	Use a squeeze light to give students a hint of the location of the target vocabulary item.	Students have been asked to share feelings. After a pause, Kelly’s facilitator flashes the light in the vicinity of the FEELINGS symbol.
<i>Light Cue - Intermittent</i>	Use a squeeze light to briefly indicate the target item.	Flash and release on the FEELINGS symbol.
<i>Light Cue – Constant</i>	Use a squeeze light to indicate the target item.	Flash and hold (or wiggle) the light on the FEELINGS symbol.
<i>Visual Model</i>	Show student an icon card that s/he can match to cue device use.	Hold up symbol card for MAD. Show symbols on device as needed.

Prompt	Description	Example
<i>Expectant Delay</i>	Give a verbal cue then pause to give students time to process the information, consider a response, access the device, etc. Pause at <u>least</u> 5 seconds.	“Okay, <u>Jarrad</u> said he might feel BORED when he’s working. Hmmm, wonder what other feelings we could put on our chart” <pause and look expectant>
<i>Verbal Prompt</i>	Give a subtle verbal cue, that tells generally WHAT to do	“Jen. Here’s your switch . . . Jen’s going to READ for us!” <i>Note: do NOT say ‘hit your switch’</i>
<i>Light Cue – general</i>	Use a squeeze light to give students a hint of the location of the target vocabulary item.	Students have been asked to share feelings. After a pause, Kelly’s facilitator flashes the light in the vicinity of the FEELINGS symbol.
<i>Light Cue - Intermittent</i>	Use a squeeze light to briefly indicate the target item.	Flash and release on the FEELINGS symbol.
<i>Light Cue – Constant</i>	Use a squeeze light to indicate the target item.	Flash and hold (or wiggle) the light on the FEELINGS symbol.
<i>Visual Model</i>	Show student an icon card that s/he can match to cue device use.	Hold up symbol card for MAD. Show symbols on device as needed.

References

(Musselwhite, 2008) www.aacintervention.com

- Cheslock, M., Ronski, M. & Sevcik, R. Providing quality AAC intervention services to very young children: Research and recommended practice. *Perspectives on Augmentative & Alternative Communication, ASHA Division 12*, 16(1), 2-6.
- Berninger, V. & Gans, B. (1986). Language profiles in nonspeaking individuals of normal intelligence with severe cerebral palsy. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 2, 45-50.
- Kuhl, P., Coffey-Corina, S., Padden, D., & Dawson, G. (2005). *Developmental Science* (8:1), pp. F1 – F12, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148.
- Ronski, M.A. & Sevcik, R. (1996). *Breaking the speech barrier. Language development through augmented means*. Baltimore: Paul H Brookes.
- Speech and language may influence later development in autism (2005). *Therapy Times*. .
<http://www.therapytimes.com/content=5901J64C489E5A841>
- Schwartz, J. (2007). *Social interaction plays key role in how infants learn language, studies show*.
www.uwnews.org

Resources for Students with ASD

(Musselwhite & Wagner, 2008) www.aacintervention.com

- Cafiero, J. (2007). Challenging our belief systems regarding people with autism and AAC: Making the least harmful assumptions. *Closing the Gap Newsletter, April, May, 2007*. www.closingthegap.com
- Cafiero, J. (2005). *Meaningful Exchanges for People with Autism: An Introduction to Augmentative and Alternative Communication*. Hodgdon, L. (2000). Joanne M. Cafiero, Ph.D., CCA Publications, 14112 Castaway Drive, Rockville, MD 20853-2626 www.lindburkhart.com
- Goossens', C., Crain, S., & Elder, P. (1992). *Engineering the Classroom Environment for Interactive Symbolic Communication – An Emphasis on the Developmental Period, 18 Months to Five Years*. Birmingham, AL: Southeast Augmentative Communication Publications.
- Goossens', C., Crain, S., & Elder, P. (1995). *Engineering Preschool Display Software* (\$129), and *Engineering Adolescent Overlay Software* (\$199). . Mayer Johnson LLC, P.O. Box 1579, Solana Beach, CA, 92075. 800-588-4548, www.mayerjohnson.com
- Hodgdon, L. (1995). *Visual Strategies for Improving Communication: Practical Supports for School and Home*.. Mayer Johnson LLC, P.O. Box 1579, Solana Beach, CA, 92075. 800-588-4548, www.mayerjohnson.com
- Musselwhite, C. & Burkhart, L. *Can We Chat? Co-Planned Sequenced Social Scripts*. (2001). AAC Intervention, 916 West Castillo Drive, Litcheld Park, AZ 85340. www.aacintervention.com
- Musselwhite, C. & King-DeBaun, P. (1997). *Emergent Literacy Success: Merging Technology and Whole Language for Students with Disabilities*. AAC Intervention: 916 West Castillo Drive, Litchfield Park, AZ 85340.
www.aacintervention.com
- National Research Council (2001). *Educating Children with Autism*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press

Musselwhite, 2008 www.aacintervention.com