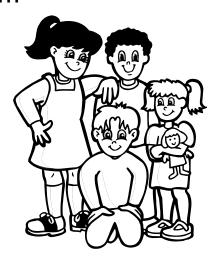# Augmentative and Alternative Communication
The Role of the AAC Team

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Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) allows students who are non-verbal or unintelligible to communicate via gesture, facial expression, sign language, morse code, communication aids (language boards, information bracelets, charts, etc), and electronic devices. It takes a team of specialists and educators to put a communication system in place as well as learn how to program and implement a device.

Becoming a Member of a Team

The use of AAC is not successful with just the student alone. It is the responsibility of the AAC team to facilitate, educate, and encourage use of the device throughout the day. Parents, teachers, OTs (occupational therapists), PTs (physical therapists) and SLPs (speech-language pathologists) must work together in order for the student to succeed at using his/her AAC device.

Generally, the SLP brings to the team knowledge of language acquisition, interaction patterns with communication partners, muscle control for speech, and knowledge of AAC devices. The OT addresses muscle control, mobility, and seating in relation to the equipment. PTs identify muscle strength, range of movement, flexibility, balance, coordination, and muscle control in relation to the equipment. The teacher has a solid knowledge base of required curriculum and state standards and parents provide current communication skills and needs of the student. Each team member is a key component in meeting the needs of the student.

Role of the SLP

It is important for the SLP to complete a thorough evaluation to determine the AAC system and device to best meet the student's needs. In any setting, an assessment should cover the following: present communication status, physical abilities/limitations, visual/perceptual abilities/limitations, cognitive and language abilities/limitations, literacy abilities/limitations, the ability to use and understand symbols, environmental concerns, and how to implement the system. The SLP sets up the communication device and system for the student to use in the classroom and teaches other members of the team to program and use the device.

Role of the Classroom Teacher

Teachers should learn basic operations of the AAC device as well as perform basic troubleshooting when the device does not work. They can assign or ask for a volunteer peer to be available during class time to assist the student using AAC. Teachers should identify and prepare vocabulary or messages prior to the lesson so that the assigned individual can program the device.

Encouraging and providing communication opportunities during the day allows the student to communicate just as often as his/her peers. Teachers should model some of these interactions/communications initially until the student learns. AAC users learn to use their devices in speech therapy as well as in day-to-day interactions, but often require repetition before mastery. Initially, students using AAC may need assistance interacting with their classmates, developing relationships, and participating in small group discussions.

Role of Peers

Many students are curious about the AAC device and want to learn more. Often you will find one or two students in the classroom who want to be a mentor, peer assistant, or special friend. Educating all students in the classroom provides more successful communication and socialization among the AAC user and peers. This is an opportunity for students without disabilities to learn to assist, respect, and care for others.

Resources

Glennen, Sharon, L. and DeCoste, Denise, C. (1997). *Handbook of Augmentative and Alternative Communication,* Singular Publishing Group, Inc.

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Division 12. (April 2005.) *Perspective on Augmentative and Alternative Communication* (Volume 14, Number 1).

(June, 2005) *Introduction to Augmentative and Alternative Communication* http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/ Augmentative-and-Alternative.htm