



Augmentative/Alternative Communication (AAC)

BQIS Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life.

Intended Outcomes

Readers will learn the definition, categories, and benefits of augmentative/alternative communication. Readers will learn basic information regarding AAC decision making.

Definitions

Communication: A process by which information is exchanged between two (2) or more individuals through a common set of behaviors or symbols.

Augmentative/Alternative Communication (AAC): The ways, other than speech, that are used to send a message from one person to another (ASHA, 2005).

Intelligence Quotient (IQ): A score derived from one of several standardized tests designed to assess human intelligence.

Facts

- Examples of AAC include:
 - Communication boards/books/picture symbols
 - Voice output communication device (VOCA), now referred to as speech-generating device (SGD)
 - Picture exchange communication system (PECS)
 - Eye gaze
- Types of AAC:
 - Low-tech systems: Refers to any simple system that is easy to use and does not require electrical power (real objects, natural gestures, sign language, picture boards, object boards)
 - Elementary-tech systems: The mid-level of technology devices that do not require a great deal of learning time and are battery operated (simple switches, one-step communicator, Twin Talk, Big Mack, talking picture frame)



- High-tech systems: The most complicated systems. These require some kind of programming and often involve a significant amount of user training to effectively establish the system (Dynavox, Chat Box)
- AAC helps the individual:
 - Control his/her environment
 - Request wants and needs
 - Express feelings
 - Supplement existing language
- AAC is not:
 - Giving up on speech
 - Only for those with a certain IQ (intelligence quotient)
 - Only the job of the speech pathologist
 - Just high-tech devices
 - A “one-time only” endeavor
 - Something that is only used at home
- AAC can be a vehicle for developing:
 - Expressive language
 - Receptive language
 - Literacy
 - Control over the environment
 - Communication initiation
- 80/20 Rule: Augmentative/alternative communication is 80% planning and 20% programming.
- If the person is unable to communicate effectively, they may benefit from augmentative communication.



Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Designing communication boards:
 - Physical considerations: Ensure the size and presentation is appropriate in meeting the physical capabilities of the individual (size of pictures, format, transportable wherever the person goes and accessible to person at all times)
 - Visual considerations: Determine what visual characteristics are appropriate (black/white or color)
 - Language/cognitive considerations: Match complexity (difficulty) of language to abilities of the individual (single word vs. phrase, pictures vs. line drawings)
2. Choose the appropriate system:
 - Individuals who are blind: Cannot benefit from visual systems, therefore, a touch system may be more appropriate
 - Individuals who are deaf: May benefit from visual input if that is their strength. Deaf individuals may not understand verbal language, but they may still have a voice output system that they learned to use because they were visually taught to touch the button and staff immediately performed the message the system indicated.
 - Individuals who are deaf and blind: May often require a tactile/touch system because understanding touch/sense related symbols is their greatest strength.
 - Individuals with ID/DD (intellectual disability/developmental disability): May require several types of input at once to understand.
3. If you feel an individual may benefit from AAC, contact a speech-language pathologist.
4. If a person has an AAC system:
 - Keep an extra set of batteries (if applicable)
 - Ensure device is kept clean
 - Ensure device is with the person in all settings and is readily available
 - Ensure staff are trained in how to use device



Learning Assessment

The following questions can be used to verify a person's competency regarding the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. True or False: The use of AAC is directly related to an individual's IQ.
2. True or False: AAC is used to replace the individual's existing language.
3. True or False: The use of AAC is 80% programming and 20% planning.
4. When designing a communication board, you should take into account:
 - A. Physical strengths
 - B. Visual strengths
 - C. Language/cognitive strengths
 - D. All of the above
5. AAC helps the individual:
 - A. Give up on their speech
 - B. Express their feelings
 - C. Control their environment
 - D. Both B and C



References

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Retrieved 06/18/2015 from <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/AAC/>.

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U. S. Department of Health & Human Services: National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. Assistive Devices for People with Hearing, Voice, Speech, or Language Disorders. Retrieved 06/18/2015 from <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/pages/assistive-devices.aspx>.

Related Resources

Basic Communication Fact Sheet Series: These resources can be located on the BQIS Fact Sheet & Reminders webpage at: <http://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/3948.htm>.

Learning Assessment Answers

1. False
2. False
3. False
4. D
5. D