PARTNER STRATEGIES
Supporting Children to Communicate with AAC
(Augmentative and Alternative Communication)

An important predictor of success in learning to use AAC systems is having
Good Communication Partners

What makes a "Good Communication Partner"?

1. Understanding that Communication goes beyond "I want..", "It is…"

2. Presuming the *Potential* of Competence

3. Modeling communication with pictures (Aided Language Input)

4. Creating Opportunities to teach meaningful, functional communication

5. Reading and Responding appropriately to the child's non-verbal signals

6. Making and Implementing a Communication Plan that includes:

   a. Specific Routines

   b. Specific Words/Messages

   c. A prompt hierarchy

   d. Instructive Feedback

Communicative Functions

Communication is about interaction and we interact for variety of reasons. Picture communication can be used not only to make requests for basic wants and needs but for many other purposes such as:

- ✓ Rejecting: *No, thank you*

- ✓ Calling attention: *Come here*

- ✓ Greeting: *Hi, How are you?*

- ✓ Commenting: *Yucky!, This is fun!*

- ✓ Describing past and future events: *I went swimming*

- ✓ Sharing information: *Mommy sick*

- ✓ Directing Other's Actions: *Close the door, please*

- ✓ Requesting information: *Who's that?*

- ✓ Expressing feelings and physical states: *I'm tired*

- ✓ Sharing and Showing objects: *Look!*

- ✓ Accepting: *Okay*

- ✓ Tease: *You silly*

- ✓ Express manners: *Thank you, I'm sorry*

- ✓ Negotiating: *Two crackers, More play now*

- ✓ Asserting independence: *I do it*

Aided Language Input

- The main purpose of this strategy is to **MODEL** or provide examples to the child of how to communicate using pictures. This strategy may also help the child understand language better

- The child will be a passive observer while you (i.e. communication partner) **point at pictures** pairing what you say, as you speak. The child is expected to **look** at the pictures as you point at them

- Pair the **key word** of what you say with its picture e.g., You say: *"It's time to go outside"* while pointing and showing to the child the picture of *GO* and/or *OUTSIDE*

- Whenever the child indicates something nonverbally, for example pulling your hand and guiding you towards an item out of his reach; show him the picture that communicates that **intent** e.g., say "*Do you need help?*" as you point at the picture of *HELP*

- Talk and point at pictures that show what the child is **hearing, seeing, doing and expressing with body language** e.g. if you can tell the child is enjoying reading/looking at a book, you point at the picture of *LIKE + BOOK* while saying *"I see you like this book"*

- Eventually, the child may start pointing at pictures to tell you things; praise him! and continue using aided language to try having a "conversation" with the child. Aided Language should be used in a highly interactive manner. Emphasis should be placed on establishing an **enjoyable shared interaction**, no quizzing or testing

- If/when the child points at a picture to tell you something, for example, the child points at the picture of *MOVIE*, **acknowledge and EXPAND his message** into a two-word sequence e.g., point at *WATCH + MOVIE* while saying *"Do you want to watch a movie?"* Increase the amount of pictures gradually as the child demonstrates increased attention to pictures being shown. Do not ask him to expand his messages! just acknowledge and SHOW him how to expand them

- Use short, concise language and speak slowly, inserting numerous pauses into the conversational flow. Use lots of **repetition** as you describe ongoing events.

Implementing Aided Language: 8 Frequent Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Aided Language seems like a simple concept: Partners should model or demonstrate picture communication when talking to children who are learning to use picture communication, so that they would learn by example. Yet, when it comes to implementation we see frequent mistakes and misinterpretations. The most commons being:

1. Forgetting that it is about us, communication partners, **modeling** or demonstrating. Frequently we see partners focusing on merely prompting the child to point or touch the picture symbols to communicate. Remember, it is about what WE do, not about what the child does. Model, model, model.

2. Using Aided Language only to give directives (e.g., "Let's go to the gym", "Get ready to eat", "Pick a colour"). Make sure you provide models of **multiple communicative functions** and purposes such as:
- Sharing information: "I heard you went to see Spider Man on the weekend"
- Making comments: "That's awesome!"
- Asking questions: "What is your favourite colour?"
- Greeting: "Hi! I'm happy to see you today!

3. Modeling only our own agenda. Remember, we are using pictures to talk to the child so that he learns how to use them to tell us things that he wants to say, things that matter to him. Pay close attention to the child, and model messages that you know the child would find **interesting, useful or meaningful.**

4. Missing valuable opportunities to show the child how to communicate with pictures by, either failing to match his non-verbal signals with pictures, or by failing to read the child's non-verbal signals altogether. Look for what the child communicates with body language and gestures and **match those with pictures.**

5. Not expanding the child's message after he uses pictures to tell us something. Remember, if we want to take the child's expressive skills to the next level, we need to **add one or two missing elements** when we repeat his messages back to him.

6. Not noticing at what the child is looking when we point to pictures; **pay attention to the child's eyes**. If you see his eyes are focusing on a particular picture, "talk" about it! –point about it!

7. Not keeping the communication device at the child's eye level when composing messages. When using high tech devices to provide aided language, sometimes partners compose the full message or sentence first and then show the final product to the child. The child needs to see every step of the process. Remember we are modeling so that they learn how to imitate it. Keep the device **at the child's eye level at all times so he can see the process clearly.**

8. Not following the lead when the child "changes the topic". If the child starts pointing at a picture not related to what we are talking about / pointing to, then **acknowledge the new topic, expand on it and keep the conversation going**

Choosing Opportunities for Modeling AAC

The chart below shows examples of messages and communicative functions that can be Modeled with picture communication during daily routines. The only expectation is for the child to attend when the partner models

ACTIVITY	OPPORTUNITY	COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION MODELED
Mealtime	Partner sees Danny reaching up for the cupboard or his lunch bag. Partner says "I see you want something to eat" while pointing to the pictures of WANT + EAT on the device	**REQUESTING** (asking for food)
	Danny takes a bite of his food during lunch. He makes a face then pulls it out of his mouth. Partner asks: "What happened?" Danny hands the bite of food to partner. She holds the device in front of him, opens the food page and says "too hot" while pointing at the picture of HOT	**COMMENTING** (describing an event)
	It's time to eat. Danny is on the computer watching YouTube videos. Partner approaches Danny and shows him the pictures of COME + EAT on the device while telling him "Come over, time to eat"	**DIRECTING SOMEONE'S ACTIONS**
Reading Time	Partner brings one book to read with Danny, shows him READ. Danny gets up and gets a different book from the shelf. Partner says; "Oh, you want the book about pirates" while pointing to READ + PIRATES	**COMMENTING** (describing an event)
	Danny looks attentively at a page showing a big whale. Partner says: "That's a big blue whale" while showing WHALE + BIG	**COMMENTING** (describing an event)
In the Classroom	Liam, Danny's peer is playing with cars. Danny joins him and grabs a car from Liam's hand. Liam starts whining. Partner asks Danny to return the car to Liam, she shows him I'M SORRY	**EXPRESSESING MANNERS** (apologizing)
	Danny is looking out the window, he is looking at squirrels going up and down a tree. Partner joins him. Danny is giggling. Teacher asks from her desk: "What's so funny?" Partner opens the Animals page and says SQUIRREL	**ANSWERING A QUESTION** (Information Sharing)
Transitioning	Mom and Danny get to the doctor's office parking lot. Danny starts whining. Mom knows he doesn't want to go inside. Mom brings the device and says DOCTOR now, then PARK	**NEGOTIATING** (Requesting change of activity)
	Danny goes to the main office to get the attendance binder. The receptionist says: "Hi Danny". Danny gets the binder without responding. His EA holds out his device while showing him HI	**GREETING** (responding Hi to an unfamiliar partner)
	Mom says: "Danny, time for bed" while showing BEDTIME on the device. Danny frowns and pushes the device away. Mom points to NO + BEDTIME and tells Danny; "Oh, you're telling me 'No bedtime"	**PROTESTING** (saying 'no')

Creating Opportunities to Teach
Functional, Meaningful Communication: 3F Rule

When should we ask the child to use pictures to communicate?

When creating and choosing opportunities to actively prompt children to start communicating with their AAC systems, consider situations and messages with the following elements:

1. **F**un, motivating and with a clear pay-off for the child: This should include actions beyond asking for highly desired or motivating things such as preferred food, toys and activities. It should include activities that bring some level of gratification to the child. For example playing turn taking games with familiar people, getting help to obtain a desired result, directing people to do things he likes or wants, commenting on things that are interesting or motivating.

2. **F**unctional, useful, referring to things that the child cannot communicate efficiently with gestures alone: Teaching the child to communicate "want + movie" may not be functional for a child if he can tell you this by pointing at the DVD player. Teaching "want + Shrek" may be more valuable for the child if he has no easier or faster way of telling you the name of the movie he wants to watch.

3. **F**ast, that can be expressed in a quick, efficient manner: if you or the child have to spend too long searching for the word to express a desired meaning, it is very likely that by the time you find the right picture, the communication moment is gone and the child has moved on to something else.

Remember that you need a PLAN for teaching. Choose carefully the words and messages you plan to prompt.

Kirkland Lake Site- 6 Tweedsmuir Road, Kirkland Lake, Ontario P2N 1H6
Muskoka Site- 100 Frank Miller Drive, Unit 2, Huntsville, Ontario P1H 1H7
New Liskeard Site- 213 Whitewood Avenue, New Liskeard, Ontario P0J 1P0
Nipissing Site- 400 McKeown Avenue, North Bay, Ontario P1B 0B2
Parry Sound Site- 70 Joseph Street, unit 304, Parry Sound, Ontario P2A 2G5

Opportunities for Teaching/Prompting AAC

The chart below shows <u>examples</u> of messages and communicative functions that have been modeled consistently and frequently in the past and are now targeted for instruction. The adult is these examples uses different levels of prompts to help the child use the AAC system

ROUTINE	OPPORTUNITY	COMMUNICATION SKILL PRACTICED
SCHOOL ARRIVAL	Danny enters the building; he is carrying his device in his shoulder. His Educational Aid approaches him and says "Hi, Danny!" . He smiles back. His EA shows the picture of HI and waits expectantly	**GREETING**
	Partner joins Danny to put backpack and lunch away; she withholds helping Danny opening up his backpack, looks at the device, waits with an expectant look and asks an open ended question: "What do you need?	**REQUESTING** (Asking for Help)
	EA joins Danny as he puts on his indoor shoes; EA tells him: "Tell me when you're done" and leaves the device next to Danny	**COMMENTING** (Describing his actions)
FREE PLAY	After seeing Danny joining his sister playing with dinosaurs on the carpet, mom prompts him to use the device by telling him: "I think you want to play with Jodi, do you want to ask her?" while opening the Chat folder on Danny's device and then showing him the DO YOU WANT TO PLAY WITH ME? message/cell	**ASKING A QUESTION**
	The teacher is modeling a pretend play routine of setting the table with another child, Danny approaches them and places a napkin on the table. He seems interested in participating. The teacher invites him to help set the table and asks: "What else do you want to put on the table, Danny? Can you tell me?" EA opens the page with Utensils for Danny to answer	**ANSWERING A QUESTION**
	Danny takes a pretend toy food belonging to his friend Chris. Chris protests and Danny gives the toy back. The EA prompts Danny to apologize by saying "Chris didn't like you taking the toy away, what do you say to him? while showing I'M SORRY on his device	**USING MANNERS**
	Dad builds a tall tower with blue blocks and invites Danny to build something. He then tells Danny: "I made a BLUE + TOWER; what do you want to make?" while showing the Play page	**ANSWERING A QUESTION**
CIRCLE TIME	Teacher asks Danny what song he would like them to sing first. EA opens the Music folder and shows options for Danny to choose	**REQUESTING** (Making Choices)
	At sharing time, teacher asks Danny what he did over the weekend. EA directs Danny to the News page/screen while pointing to sequence of pre-stored messages/cells	**SHARING INFORMATION**
	Teacher asks Danny to choose which classmate can come up next to tell the weather; EA directs him to People screen/page	**REQUESTING** (Making Choices)
TRANSITIONS	As teacher announces time to clean up and Danny gets impatient, EA asks an open ended question "What do you want? while showing him the device	**ANSWERING A QUESTION**

Reading and Responding to the Child's Non-Verbal Signals

Should we ask the child to use pictures to say what he is communicating without words?

If the child is communicating a message with a gesture and the gesture is clear and acceptable for the team, you don't need to prompt the child to use the device but you can take advantage of the opportunity to MODEL communication with the device. For example: the child taps the seat of a chair next to him while smiling at you, inviting you to sit by his side --the child's non-verbal message is clear; he is communicating "come sit with me" with his gesture. Instead of prompting the child with "tell me" or "use your voice", seize the opportunity to MODEL by verbally acknowledging his message -- "Ah, you're telling me to SIT next to you" while pointing at the picture of SIT or COME HERE on the device. This sends the child the message that his way of communicating (tapping the seat) was understood and acknowledged, while exposing him to picture communication.

Modeling by matching the child's clear non-verbal signals with a picture is appropriate if the child is highly familiar with communication partners modeling picture communication across different communicative situations or contexts. If the child is used to seeing adults using the AAC system mostly to tell him what to do, (e.g., "time to EAT", "go GET your book") he will probably perceive your matching of his non-verbal signals with a picture as one more demand, as a concealed *"this is the way you should say it"* request. On the other hand, if the child is familiar with partners modeling AAC to express all kinds of messages, including comments like "look, it's RAINING", or "I'm COLD" or "JACOB is here" he may interpret your modeling of his non-verbal signals at face value, as one more comment, with no strings attached. He will likely pay more attention to you and the AAC system knowing there are no expectations on hidden agendas. He will also recognise that his signals are not only understood and acknowledged but also validated as an acceptable communication mode across environments and partners.

When reading and responding to the child's non-verbal signals keep in mind that you don't have to honour each demand, but you have to ACKNOWLEDGE the child's non-verbal signals and, whenever possible, provide feedback using pictures. For example, the child pushes books away when you start a shared reading activity. You say: "I see you don't want to read books now" --while pointing to NO + BOOK. "We'll read the book fast and then we'll do something else" –while pointing to BOOK + FAST

You should prompt the child to communicate with pictures only for messages containing words, phrases or sentences that you <u>have chosen or planned</u> to teach and you should MODEL for everything else

ONE KIDS PLACE
LA PLACE DES ENFANTS
CHILDREN'S TREATMENT CENTRE
CENTRE DE TRAITEMENT POUR ENFANTS

Providing Appropriate Prompts

1. **Model** i.e., demonstrating pressing or pointing 2. **Visual and/or Verbal cues:** Visual: • Choices e.g., *Do you want <u>juice</u> or <u>water?</u>* (showing pictures) • Opening page on device • Holding device in front of child Verbal: • Choices e.g., *Do you want apple or juice?* (verbal only) • Directive: *"Use your iPad/Talker" "Tell me" "Use your voice"* • Open ended question e.g., *What do you want?"* 3. **Subtle Reminder**: e.g., glancing at device, touch on elbow 4. **Pause:** not a pre-determined amount of seconds; depends on the child	**IN GENERAL:** • Use Most-to-Least when introducing something new; the first few times • Move down the hierarchy a soon as you see evidence of learning • Use Least-to-Most for messages that the child has already learned to communicate • If the child does not imitate with modelling, use physical guidance BUT fade it ASAP

DON'T	**DO**
• "Say crackers" • "Show me crackers" • "Touch crackers" • "Find crackers"	• "What do you want?" • "Do you want crackers or cheese?" • "Use your voice" • "I can't hear you"

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Providing Meaningful, Instructive Feedback

- Goes beyond 'good job'

- Is descriptive: *"I like how you said:_____"*

- Make your response <u>contingent</u> on what was communicated: Respond to what the child says even if you think he didn't mean to say it

- Acknowledge the child's message and <u>expand</u> it by taking language to the next level

    o Child says "water"
    o Partner says: "want + water"

    _____

    o Child says: "want + candy"
    o Partner says: "want + red + candy"

    _____

    o Child says: "go + outside + please"
    o Partners says: " go + outside + now + please"

Making a Communication Plan

- MODELING is different than PROMPTING

- A Communication Plan includes details on both, MODELING and PROMPTING

- Initially you only do MODELING. Provide Modeling many, many times; as much as you can, throughout daily routines and activities. This can be overwhelming. Start by choosing specific words you want to model and choose routines when it is realistic and possible for you to model

- After you have been modeling for a while, you can start PROMPTING use of the system

- Select carefully the words that you are going to PROMPT and the situation/ routine when you are going to prompt. Words should be practical, meaningful, functional, and with clear pay off for the child

- Ask the child to use the device *only* for those specific words that you are targeting across the Routines you have chosen

- Ideally, include at least 2 different communicative functions

- Determine level of prompts for each word or message

- Make sure you provide instructive feedback

- Keep track of words being taught and the level of prompting needed

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Communication Plan for Modeling and Prompting AAC

CLIENT:_____   Home Environment   or   School Environment (circle one)   DATE: _____

ROUTINE	Modeling	Prompting	OPPORTUNITY / MESSAGE	Greeting	Requesting	Getting attn.	Rejecting	Commenting	Answering Q	Sharing Info	Asking Q	Labeling	