Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Team

AAC and Literacy
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Getting Started

✓ Be connected to the wireless printer, print from the device when possible deleting old documents when you have them printed.

✓ Don’t forget about low-tech resources. If it is easier to use a choice board for an activity then do so, but always have the device to hand.

✓ Inclusion is imperative. Use inclusive texts and resources. Have you got pictures of AAC users amongst cartoons of young people? Currently there are very few books and stories available with characters in them that are AAC users. Keep an eye out for new releases.
✓ Model, model, model! As the adult, the young person NEEDS to see YOU using the device. Sabotage the communication (pretend you don’t know something that is being said to encourage the young person to become persistent) and explore vocabulary together, practicing the motor planning.

✓ Use a prompt hierarchy to increase the young person’s independence skills and to focus you on extending their progress.

✓ Reduce the number/length of tasks to suit the young person. It will take an AAC user (particularly one with a physical impairment) longer to complete a task. Even talking can take longer due to typing or selecting the correct buttons. Remember this and differentiate accordingly.

✓ Core words are essential to all communication methods. Ensure core words are taught and modelled. You could have a ‘core word of the week’ and try to use it in as much communication as possible.
✓ Don’t make more work for yourself. If you are using a worksheet for the class and you want it on the AAC device use the free Snaptype app (iOS) or photograph it (windows) so that the young person can access it electronically.

✓ Develop the young person’s working memory skills. Young people that use AAC have a higher cognitive load as they are holding what they want to say in their short term memory in order to write/type/sign their message. There are many activities that can be used to develop a young person’s working memory skills online.

✓ Assess, Plan, Do, Review (SEND Code of Practice 0-25). Ensure you are using this cycle to support progress for the young person. Make particular focus on the review section. If something is not working and the young person is not making progress, change it!
**Reading**

- Explore other alternatives if synthetic phonics is not working, e.g. whole word reading. Remember to assess, plan, do, review. If the ‘do’ is not working, change it!

- Use electronic books as well as printed books. The more exposure to a wider range of print, the better. There are ways in which electronic books can be read to the young person too depending on what device the pupil uses.

- Ensure you have a balanced literacy curriculum that include shared reading as well as shared writing. The device should be available during reading sessions and the adult may need to model where certain phrases or words are allocated on the device.

- The AAC pupil has not been exposed to as much language as their non-AAC peers. Plan for vocabulary instruction and ensure that vocabulary is on the device (unless they have a text-to-speech communication system). E.g. on your lesson plan ensure you have identified the AAC user and what vocabulary you would like them to develop during the session.
 ✓ Keep the vocabulary general on the device. You do not want a page or folder on the device with just vocabulary around one specific book that you are only reading for two weeks!

 ✓ Colour code verbs and nouns in the AAC vocabulary for short term progress. Aim to not use colour coding longer term as some verbs can also be nouns, which can confuse the AAC user. Devices often come with their own colour-coding system. Stick to this if you can as it will mean consistency throughout the device.

**Writing**

 ✓ Spelling skills are crucial. The better a young person can spell the quicker they can access any vocabulary in any language.

 ✓ Use alternative pencils and allow young people to make mistakes. Don’t correct them right away, if you’re scribing for them. A scribe is a scribe. Write down everything they are saying, mistakes and all.
✓ Accept words with a similar meaning or inventive explanations, e.g. accept ‘Henry’ and ‘8’ as Henry VIII and ‘conservatory’ could be answered as ‘glass house’.

✓ Know how to turn on/off the predictive text on the device- useful for exams and for spelling tests.

✓ Be clear on your outcome of the activity; predictive text can be used if it is a sentence level activity, predictive text should not be used when testing spellings for example.

✓ Use different apps and programs to develop spelling skills - there are many free and low-cost apps out there that are excellent.

✓ Think about using software and word processors that contain word banks. This will speed up writing and scaffold learning.
Assessment

✓ Does the young person really need a scribe for a test? If the young person is otherwise independent and can use their device to answer exam questions fight for their right to do so in exams. If the methods are part of normal working practice for the young person then they can be used in exam conditions as long as it has been agreed with the exam board in advance. The AAC Adviser can support the school in access to exams.

✓ The AAC adviser will be assessing and linking the pupil’s abilities using their device, directly to the curriculum. Use their assessments to inform yours.

✓ Celebrate every success, progress may be slower than other pupils or it may be harder to assess but each success is equally important to the AAC user, their family and their friends.
**General Tips**

- Network with other professionals by attending training provided locally or nationally. Make links with other educational settings that have pupils using AAC. Contact the AAC Adviser for information around this and use the AAC Team’s webpage and school messenger to keep updated on latest resources, training dates and information.

- Make use of the excellent Facebook groups online that are for general AAC use as well as specific software support groups.
Resources

✓ Log on to CALL Scotland, for more ideas and suggestions about assistive technology and recording the AAC pupil’s learning. CALL Scotland also have brilliant online learning modules for literacy and AAC as well as general AAC use. www.callscotland.org.uk/home

✓ Explore the software website, they often have handy guides, videos and resources for you to watch or download. More and more software companies are developing resources that can be used with any software as they are around the principles of learning to use AAC rather than about the specific software.

✓ Search for AAC on the Cornwall Council website, there you will find all of our helpful guides and signposts for more information. www.cornwall.gov.uk/AAC

✓ Explore the Communication Matters website, and their AAC e-learning page; www.aacelearning.org.uk
For more information on AAC, see our guide on ‘Top Tips for AAC in Mainstream Classrooms.’

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