



Video Café Q&A:

Dana Nieder on Getting Started with AAC

This webinar, [Video Café Q&A: Dana Nieder on Getting Started with AAC](#), provides parents and caregivers with insightful information, advice, and tips on the use of AAC technology with young children.

1. What are some words of encouragement for a parent who is new to the idea of their child communicating with technology?

AAC is a recognized intervention approach in Speech Therapy; it can help in language development skills, in the acquisition of verbal speech, and serves as an alternate route for speech. Parents can perhaps approach AAC as an “intervention,” rather than as a means of communication that the child will use in the future. It is also important that parents understand that the use of AAC is about the child’s right to accessible communication while speech is developing.

2. What are some tips for parents who feel overwhelmed at first with a robust AAC option?

First, appreciate the system. Because when you introduce your child to the system, you will learn together. Think about the advantage you have because you can rely on the text—and your child can’t. Appreciating the system’s features will allow you to learn to simplify, scaffold, and make it accessible for you as a new user. As you start using the system as much as possible, you will gain fluency in this new language. That is how you will help your child become comfortable in accessing the system and start communicating.

For parents who are already using AAC and feel overwhelmed, the Internet offers a variety of resources. Most social media channels have support groups. Follow PrAACtical AAC on Facebook and Twitter, the Uncommon Sense blog at: <https://www.facebook.com/Uncommon-Sense-Blog-123130417730793/> and the Speak for Yourself User’s Group found at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/273873326092019/>

On Twitter, check these hashtags: #augcomm, #aac, #assistivetech, #slpeeps, #apraxia, #nonverbal, #autism, #slp2b, #specialneeds, #nonverbal. Also, follow a few big users and then watch what hashtags they use.

- 3. Any recommendations for low-cost AAC apps? I am looking for technology to “play” with, but cannot justify spending \$200 or more on apps like “Speak for Yourself” or “Proloquo2Go” just for this reason.**

SLP and other professionals have access to free professional copies of most apps. “Speak for Yourself” and “DynaVox Compass” have “light” versions that are free. For free and/or low-cost the best place to check is Jane Farral’s list: (<http://www.janefarrall.com/aac-apps-lists/>)

- 4. How do you tell the difference between exploring, practicing, or playing vs. stimming when children are using AAC technology? Should this distinction be made?**

It’s worth trying to analyze what the motivation is, simply for your own knowledge of what the user is going through. Do they need that repetition? Are they learning something or is there a specific set of words that they’re really focused on, that maybe should be opened up or explored? However, in a classroom, it comes down to responding to the AAC device and the AAC user as you if it was speech from a typical child. In terms of stimming, think about whether there is a certain area of the screen that is being accessed repeatedly to see if there is an accessing issue.

- 5. Is it better to use photos or symbols for beginning users when programming new words in “Speak for Yourself?”**

If you’re using a system like Speak for Yourself or the LAMP Words for Life app or a PRC device or Proloquo2Go, the actual icon is not as important if the icons stay in the same place. The child does not have to rely as much as scanning and recognizing those pictures since they are always in the same place.

- 6. Why is it important to wait and not “fill in the blanks” as your child uses AAC?**

Although it can feel difficult not to facilitate or jump in, and it seems like we’re making things more difficult for the child by waiting and making them come up with the speech, they will learn to be passive in conversation early on. By filling in, we are limiting what we think of as their speech capability, limiting them to only communicating about things in their immediate surroundings, and limiting them to only talking about things that are happening in the present tense. There is long-term importance in encouraging your child to speak up and making some things more difficult so that they learn to advocate for themselves.

7. Why is it important for parents to be invested and engaged in their child's AAC learning?

It's important for parents to be well-educated about AAC. So if parents decide to get a formal AAC evaluation done, they can be ready to critique that evaluation. Parents need to be involved and have to ensure that whoever is driving the AAC bus for their children is the one who believes in them the most. Knowledge of AAC systems does not necessarily make someone more qualified to make decisions about a child's system than a parent who is ready to presume competence and to do the work of implementing at home.

8. How do you balance being too demanding with the school team?

Start by trying to understand what's happening in the classroom or at the school that is the barrier to their ability to embrace the device. Do they feel shorthanded in the classroom? Is the child now showing interest in the device in the classroom? Are they lacking training? Do they erroneously feel like it's too complicated for the child to use? Getting to the heart of what the problem is, is key in figuring out what the solution is.

In terms of getting training in, ask for a meeting with the paraprofessionals. At that meeting, show videos to show how easy modeling is! Videos, especially of your child, are one of the most powerful ways to get people on board who might be hesitating.

If you're in a situation where you feel like you're begging everyone to participate, try to find an inside man to get on board with you. Find whichever professional seems to be the most interested or to honor your child most, and bring them to the meeting. If you can't find someone on the inside, bring in an outside professional, like a private speech therapist who is on board with AAC, or a device rep, or a rep from one of the app companies to give a universal perspective.

