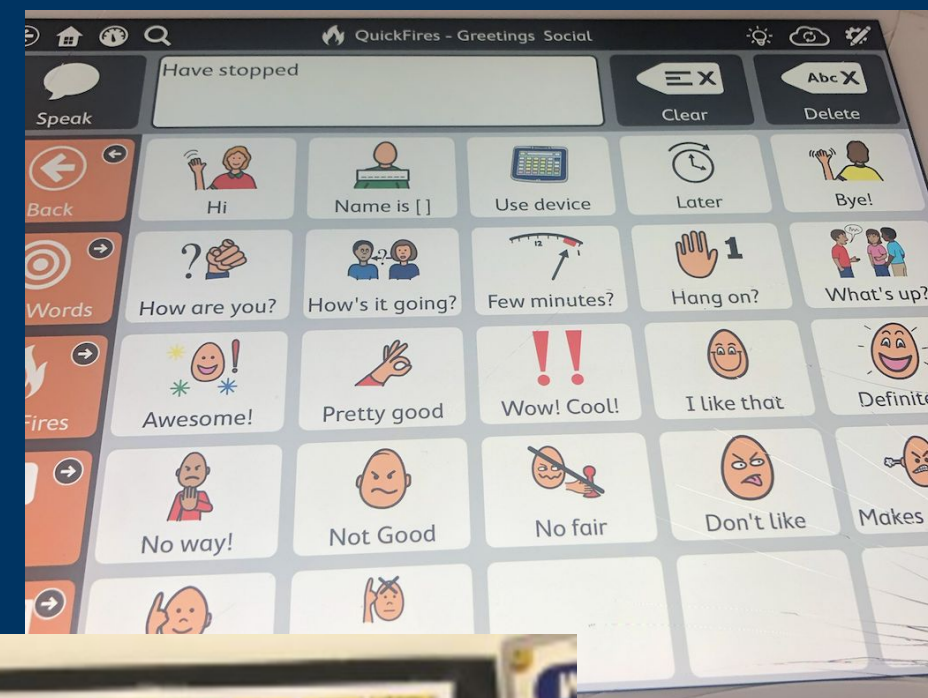


Ideas, Examples, and Strategies to Improve Authentic Connection Through the Use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)



Rebecca Warren, M.A. CCC-SLP
Amy Donaldson, MOT, M.Ed., OTR/L

Non-Verbal vs. Non-Speaking

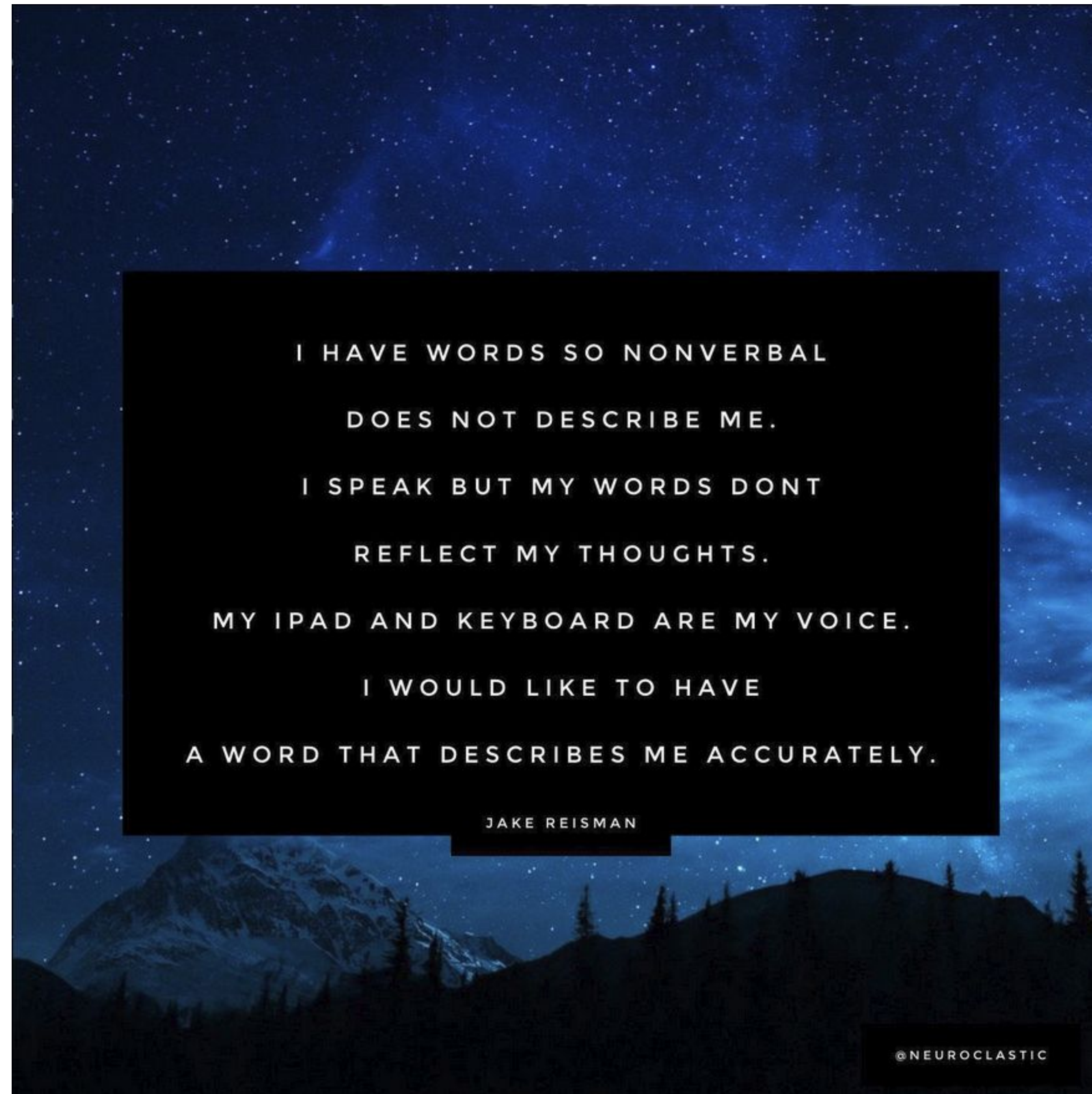
Non-Verbal

- Without words
- Assumes those without words cannot use words entirely.
- Implies cannot understand words.
- Doesn't encompass someone's ability to use sign language, writing, or other alternative systems.

Non-Speaking

- Better describes a person's method of communicating.
- Reinforces receptive language abilities.
- Preferred terminology by most communities





What does AAC mean to you?

What does accessibility mean to you?

How do they relate?



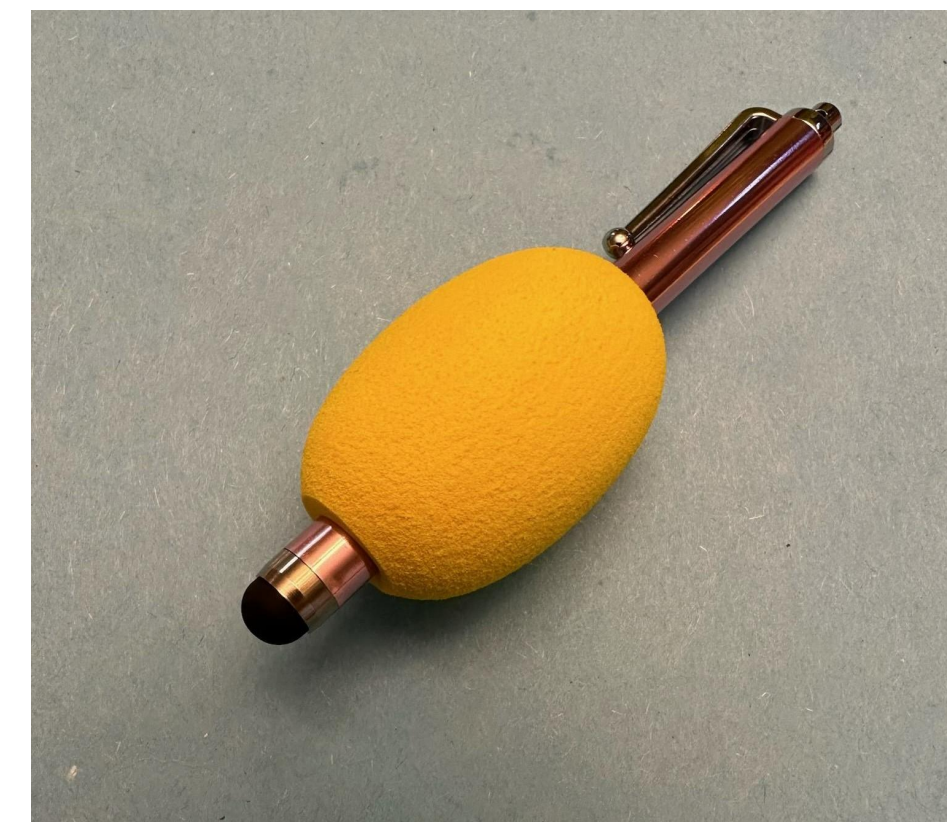
Assistive Technology

Umbrella Term

Assistive, Adaptive, or Rehabilitative Devices for adults and children with disabilities

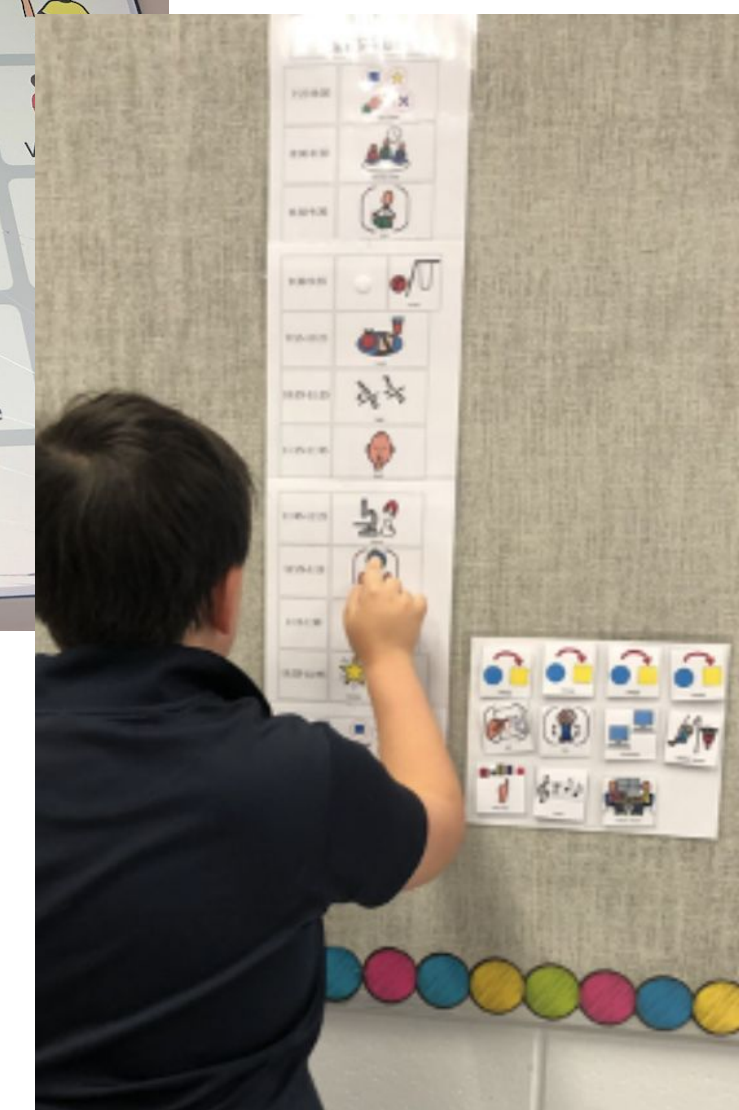
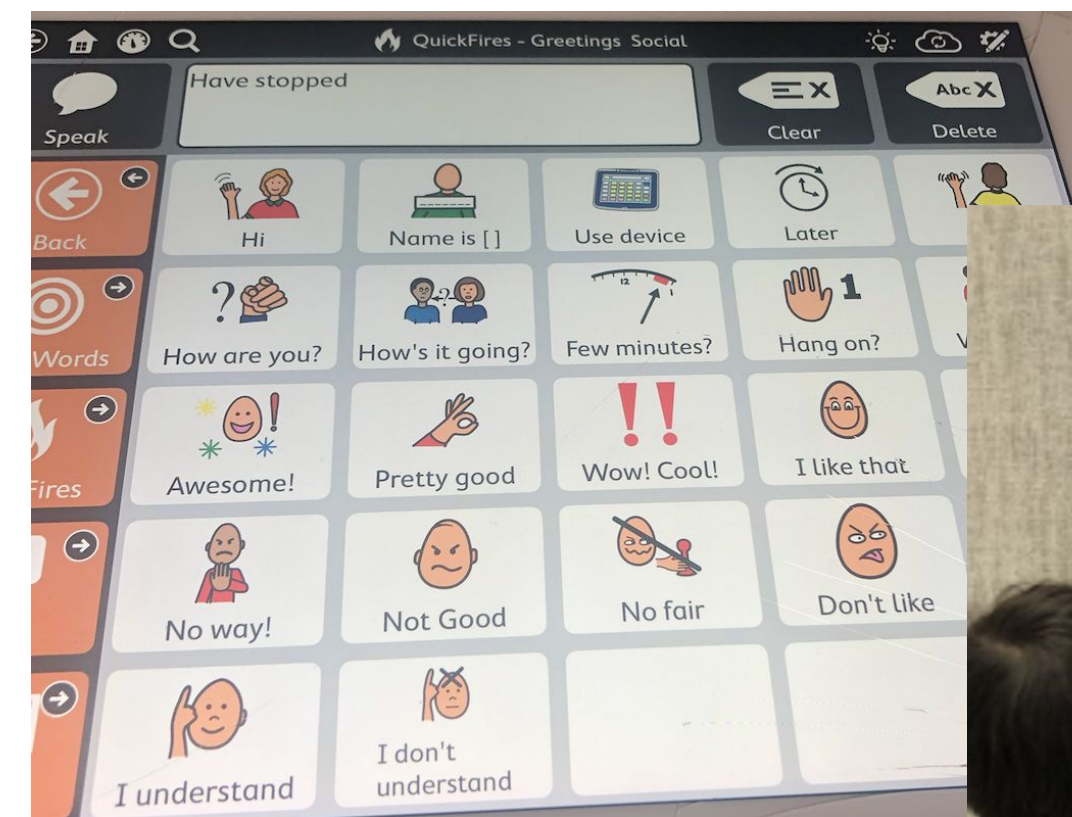


Adapted Stylus
Keyguards
Modified Cases
High/Low contrast
Seating/Positioning
modifications
AAC system/device



What is AAC?

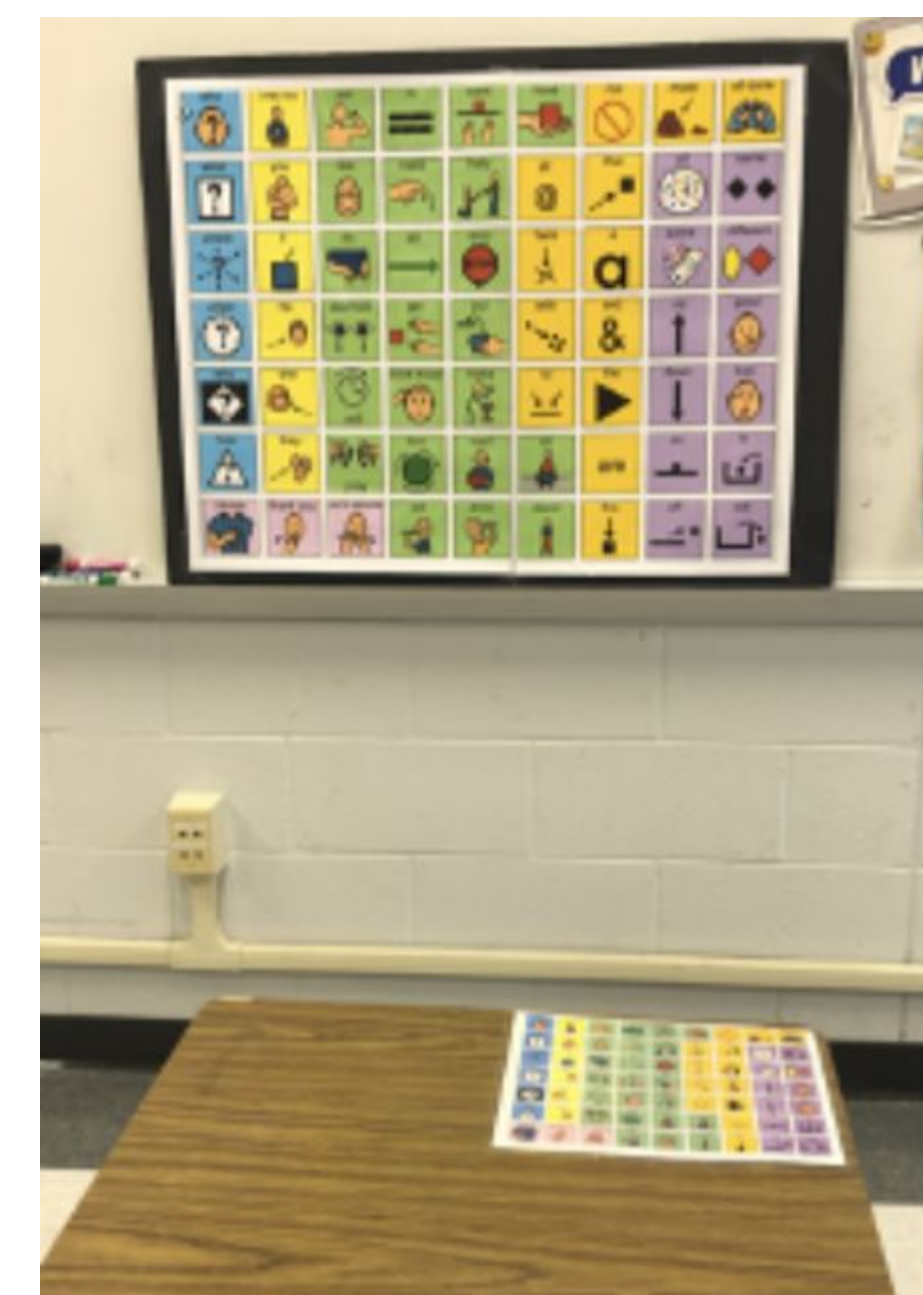
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication
- Under the Assistive Technology Umbrella
- Communication devices, systems, strategies and tools that **REPLACE** or **SUPPORT** natural speech



SIGN
VISUAL SUPPORTS
GESTURING
BODY LANGUAGE
HIGH-TECH LANGUAGE SYSTEM
LOW -TECH BOARD
BUTTON
OBJECTS
TEXTING
FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



like	want	get	make	good	more
not	go	look	turn	help	different
I	he	open	do	put	same
you	she	that	up	all	some
it	here	in	on	can	finished
where	what	why	who	when	stop



What is the Purpose?

Foundational and Driving Pillar

- Having environmental supports and tools necessary to **access** the communication system
- It's not so much about the communication system- it's more about having **tools** and **skills** at any moment to be able to express our **internal thoughts**
- **SNUG**- utterance generation

Communication Autonomy

“Being able to say what I want to say, to whoever I want to say it to, whenever I want to say it, however I choose to say it.”

-Gayle Porter, SLP



A A	B B	C C	D D
E E	F F	G G	H H
I I	J J	K K	L L
M M	N N		

O O	P P	Q Q	R R
S S	T T		
U U	V V	W W	X X
Y Y	Z Z		

Independence vs. Autonomy

Both are important

- Keep autonomy in the back of your mind
- Is what you're saying in line with your internal thoughts?
- May go between systems and independence/autonomy depending on motivation, energy/fatigue, communication partner, etc.

AAC: Independence vs. Autonomy

Independence

- Accessing AAC without the assistance of someone else
- May limit autonomy
 - Prestored message doesn't match internal thoughts.
 - Some devices may not allow for novel generation.
- An individual may be independent in some systems and not in others
- Important, but NOT the driving factor
- Many times, fine and gross motor skills will have implications for independent access.
 - May require eye gaze, switch access, direct selection with fingers, etc.

Autonomy

- The driving factor in AAC
- The who, what, where, when, and how
- Words you express match your internal thoughts.
- Choosing how you will and will not communicate.
 - Responding is communication too!
- SNUG
 - Access to robust language and spelling (literacy instruction)
 - Does not need to be grammatically correct.
- Requires access to multiple forms of AAC (high tech to low tech) to ensure availability.
- May not always be independent (partner assisted scanning)
- The goal for EVERYONE

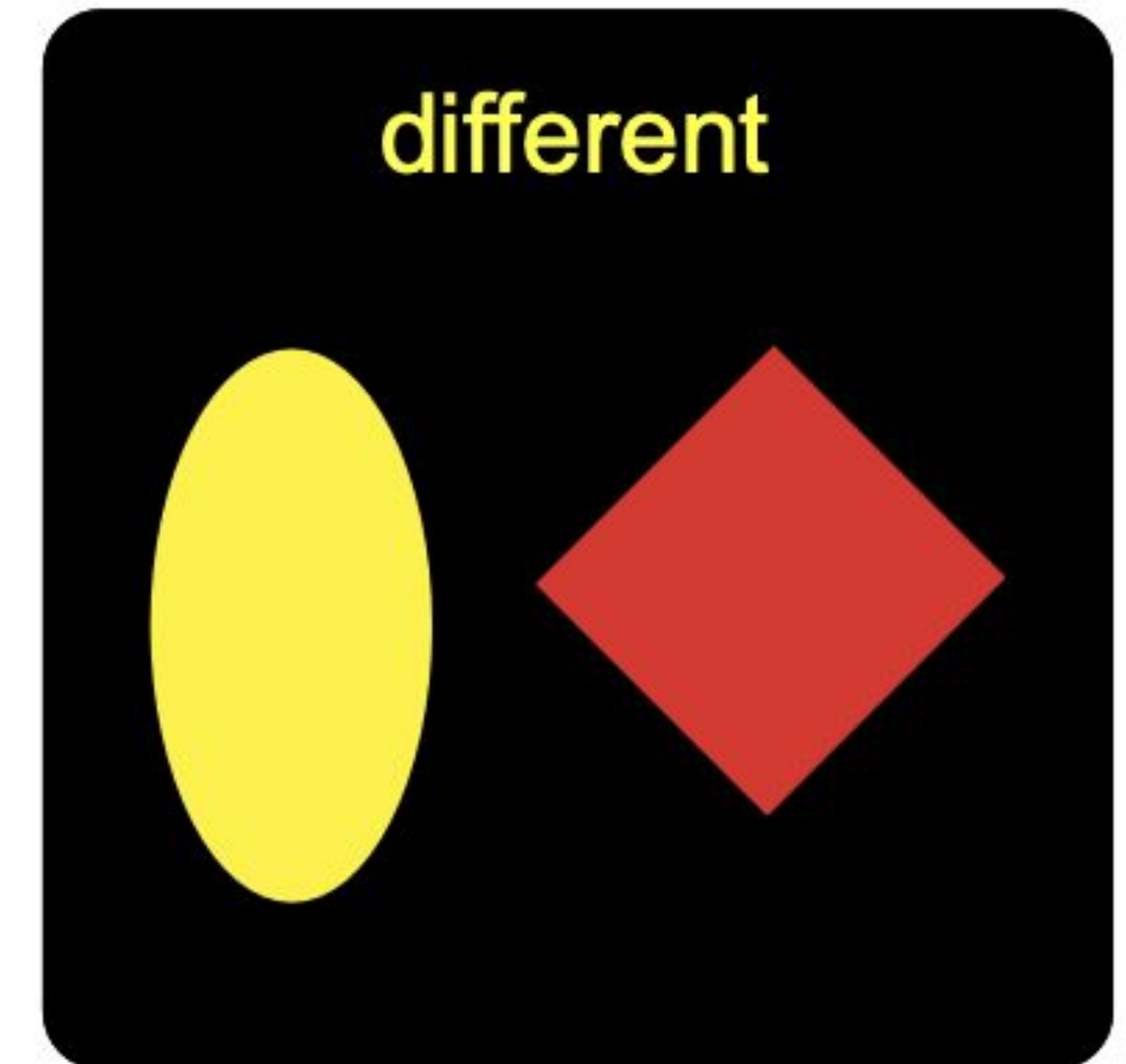


Adapted from The AAC Coach

What would you like to drink?

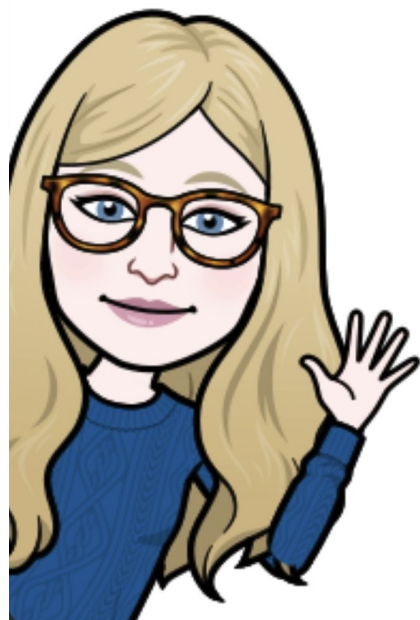


What would you like to drink?



Autonomy vs. Compliance

- Communication ALWAYS starts with **connection**
- Focusing on compliance runs the risk of **device abandonment**, increase in maladaptive **behaviors**, and **failure to communicate**.



AAC: Compliance vs. Autonomy

Compliance

- People question my ability.
- Constantly being **tested**
- **No space to be wrong** or problem solve through a situation.
- Work on someone else's agenda- leads to **confusion and anxiety**. This makes it harder to organize my body, my thoughts and respond.
- Often **uneasy** and do not feel safe. I spend energy on trying to **figure out** what others want, and I am supposed to do.
- I see AAC as **work** and something other people make me do.

Connection and Autonomy

- Others believe I have the **potential** to learn. They accept what I can do now, and we **build my skills** together.
- I act for my own purposes and intents, so it is easier to **organize my thoughts and body** to respond.
- Others **respect** what I say and **respond** to me. Others value and respect me
- I **feel safe** and can use my energy to learn and pursue my interests.
- I see AAC as my voice and it **helps** me.

Adapted from The AAC Coach



Core/Fringe Vocabulary

Many systems are designed with Core and Fringe Vocabulary in mind.

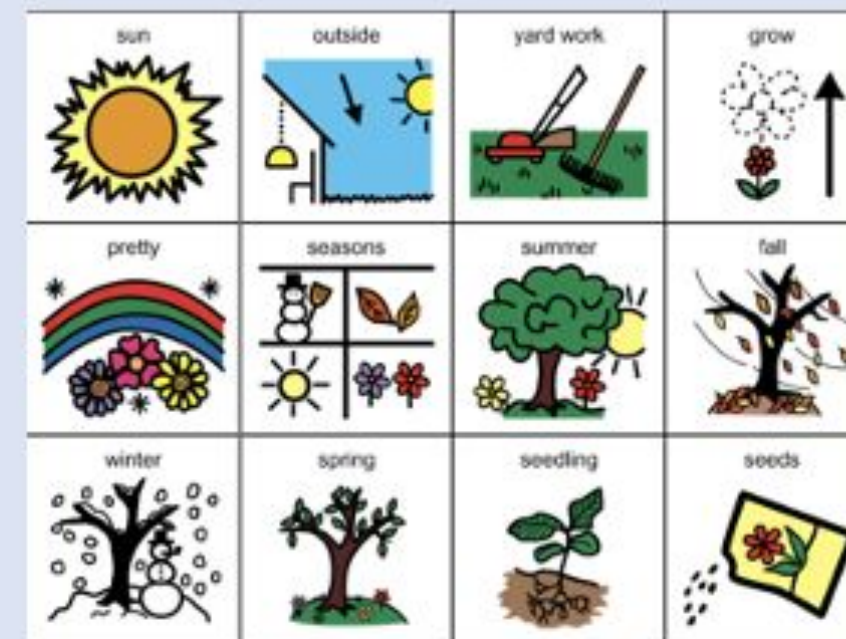
Core Vocabulary

- Most “bang for your buck,” powerful
- 70-80% of the words we use.
- Overlap with sight/high frequency words.
- Used across topics, activities, places, etc.
- Great place to start, but most powerful when combined with fringe.
- Examples: I, YOU, GO, MORE, NOT, WANT, LIKE, IT, STOP, HERE, EAT



Fringe Vocabulary

- Extra, topic- specific words - 20-25% of the words we use.
- Includes many nouns.
- May vary based on situations, person’s interests, etc.
- Examples: TRAIN, PIZZA, BOWLING, BLANKET, TOOTHBRUSH, etc.



Adapted from The AAC Coach

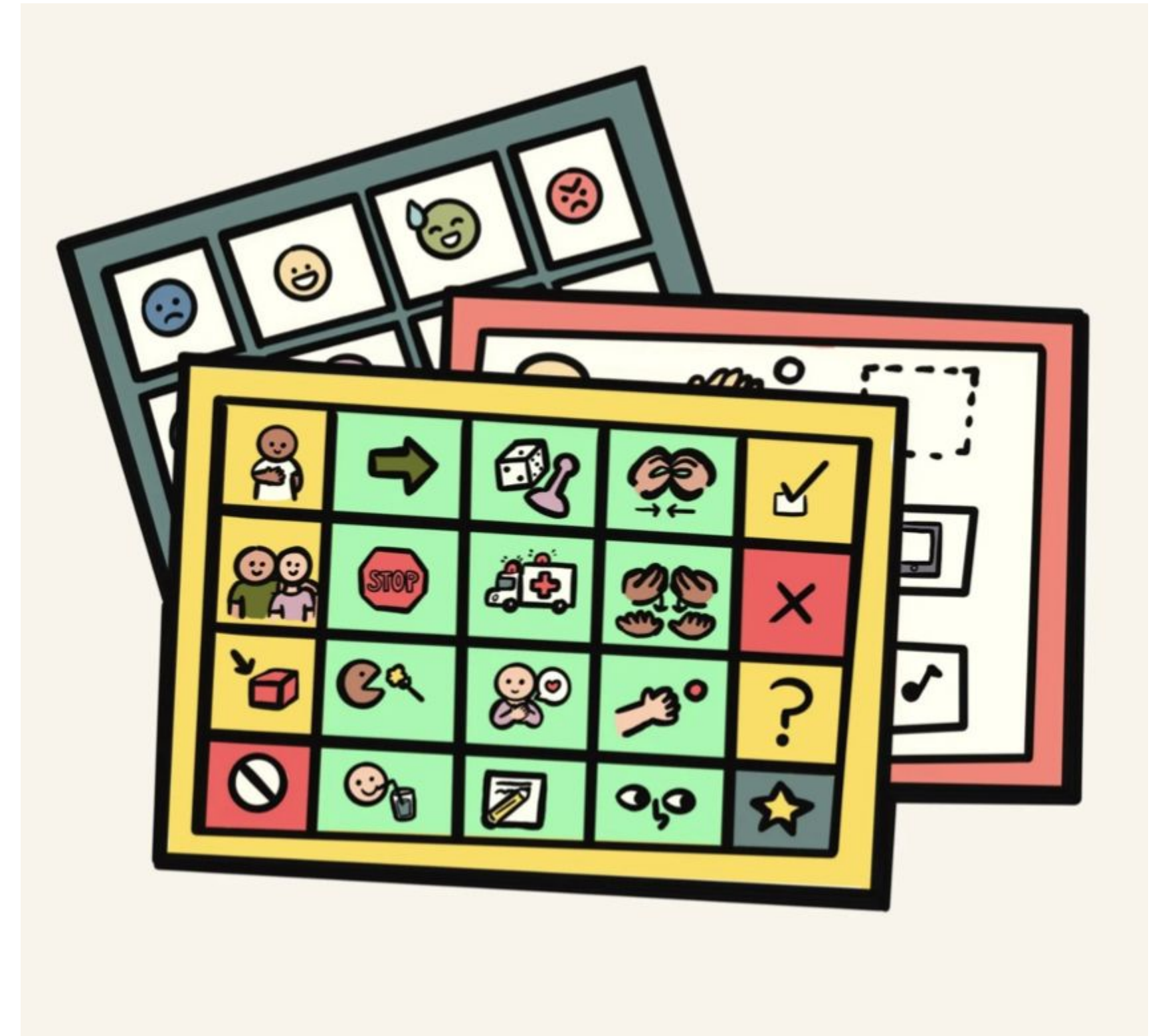


Everyone needs both!

Let's Practice!

Using a board (core, fringe, or core/fringe), write down what you may be able to say in the following activity:

1. Playing with Cars
2. Cooking dinner



Prerequisite Skills

Are there prerequisite skills necessary for the learner to have prior to starting AAC?



There are no prerequisite skills needed to start AAC!

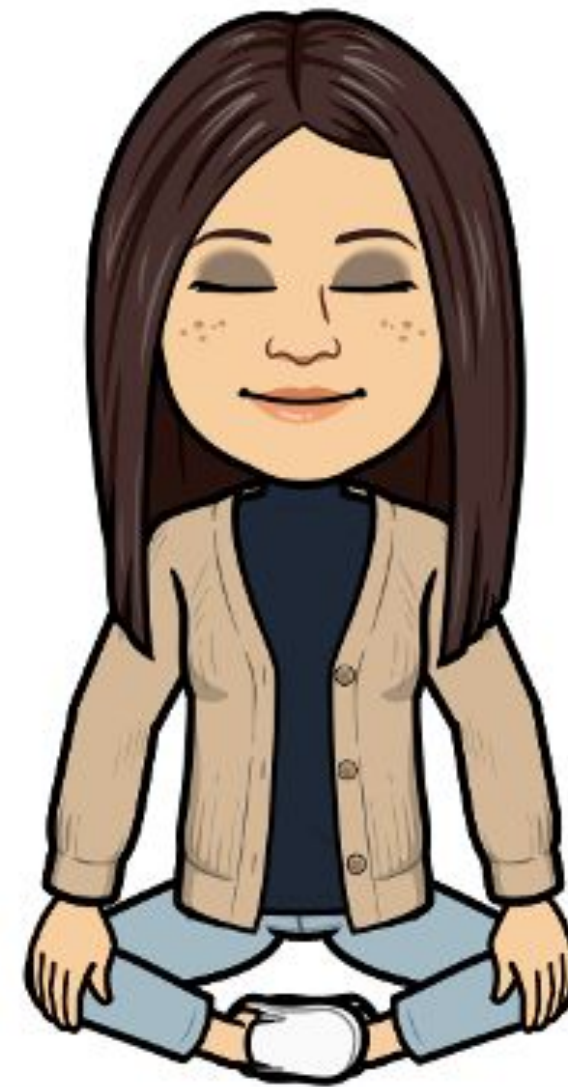
AAC IS Language. Would you ever say a baby is too young to speak to? Of course not. We speak to infants the moment they are born.

Prerequisite States of Being: Co-Regulation and Self-Regulation

AAC: Co-Regulation and Self-Regulation

Co-Regulation

- Beware of your own energy
- Low and Slow
- Provide calm, soothing, predictable, and consistent support.



Self-Regulation

- Be observant of what the child is seeking and/or avoiding.
- Allow the child to lead.
- Understand that sensory regulation is fluid. Allow a variety of supports to facilitate regulation.



(Charles & Glennon, 2020)
(Sossin & Charone-Sossin, 2007)

Prerequisite Skills for Communication Partners

Ways to be a good communication partner

1. Do not focus on compliance
2. Presume Potential
3. Respect ALL methods of communication
4. Respect Sensory Needs



How to Be a Good Communication Partner

- Talk to and with them using AAC (language **input** = language **output**)
- Respond to **any attempt** by the learner to communicate. **Do not ignore!**
- Understand their communication comes **BEFORE** planned activities and what you have to say.
- Give plenty of time to communicate. **Don't worry if it feels awkward!**
- Do not worry about grammar! If you understand what they are saying, great! Move on.
- **Do not interrogate!** Try to go 10 minutes and NOT ask a question!



Adapted from The AAC Coach

Being a Good Partner: Focus on Connection

This slide is in here twice because it's worth saying again!

AAC: Compliance vs. Autonomy

Compliance

- People question my ability.
- Constantly being **tested**
- **No space to be wrong** or problem solve through a situation.
- Work on someone else's agenda- leads to **confusion and anxiety**. This makes it harder to organize my body, my thoughts and respond.
- Often **uneasy** and do not feel safe. I spend energy on trying to **figure out** what others want, and I am supposed to do.
- I see AAC as **work** and something other people make me do.

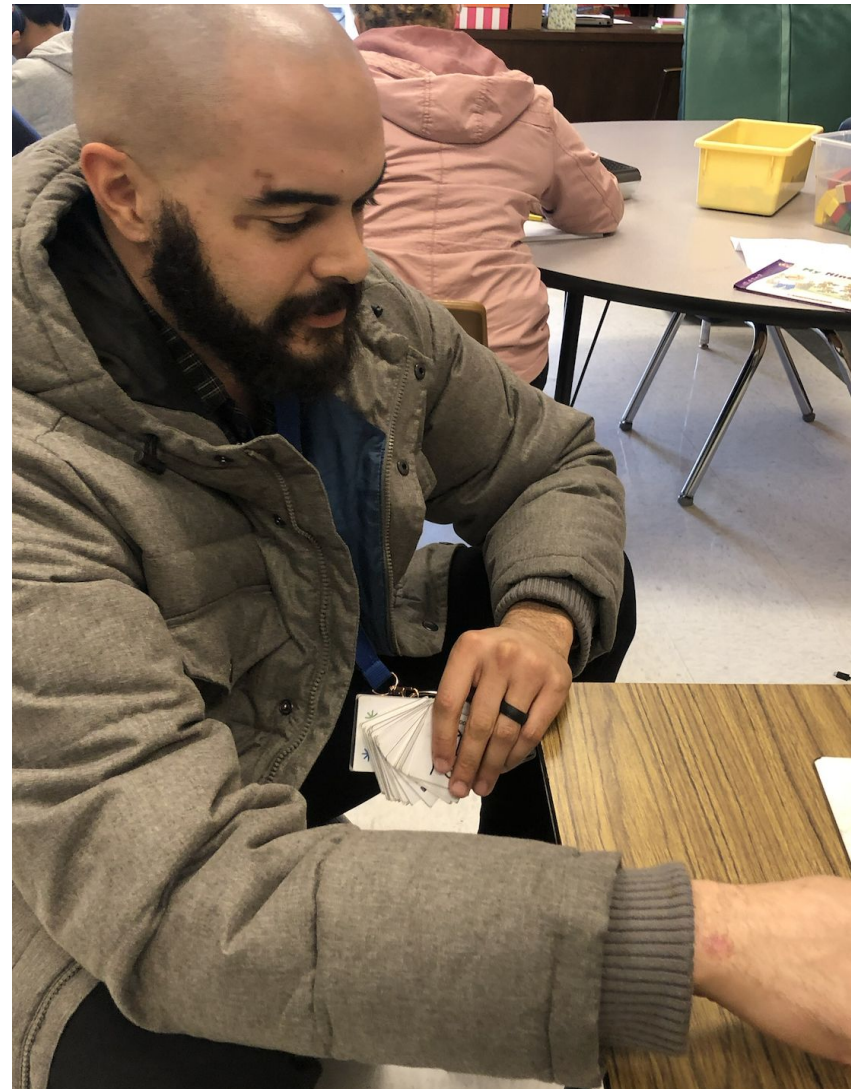
Connection and Autonomy

- Others believe I have the **potential** to learn. They accept what I can do now, and we **build my skills** together.
- I act for my own purposes and intents, so it is easier to **organize my thoughts and body** to respond.
- Others **respect** what I say and **respond** to me. Others value and respect me
- I **feel safe** and can use my energy to learn and pursue my interests.
- I see AAC as my voice and it **helps** me.

Adapted from The AAC Coach



Being a Good Partner: Presuming Potential



Presuming Potential

To presume competence/potential is to acknowledge that all individuals **have the ability to learn, to communicate, to participate** in their own way. It means that we **provide opportunities** by creating accessible and inclusive spaces.



Failure to presume potential is to **actively harm.**

Being a Good Partner: Respect All Modes

- Expand on what the learner has communicated
- Would you text your communication partner LOL every time you laughed?



Respect All Modes!
It's all AAC.

Has the learner made their point? Great, move on.

Do not have them repeat themselves. Instead acknowledge their communication attempt and expand their language.

"I see you signing 'Open.' Yes, I will **OPEN** the **MILK** for **YOU**.
OPEN MILK."

A cartoon illustration of a woman with long dark hair, smiling and looking towards the speech bubble. She has her hands clasped in front of her.

Being a Good Partner: Respect Sensory Needs

- Use co-regulation strategies
- Allow the use of sensory tools/experiences before and within AAC device use
- Watch for body language and take breaks before dysregulation occurs
- Embed sensory experiences before and during AAC use



Specific Intervention Strategies

If you take away anything, take this!

- 1. Aided Language Stimulation
- 2. Modeling Without Expectation

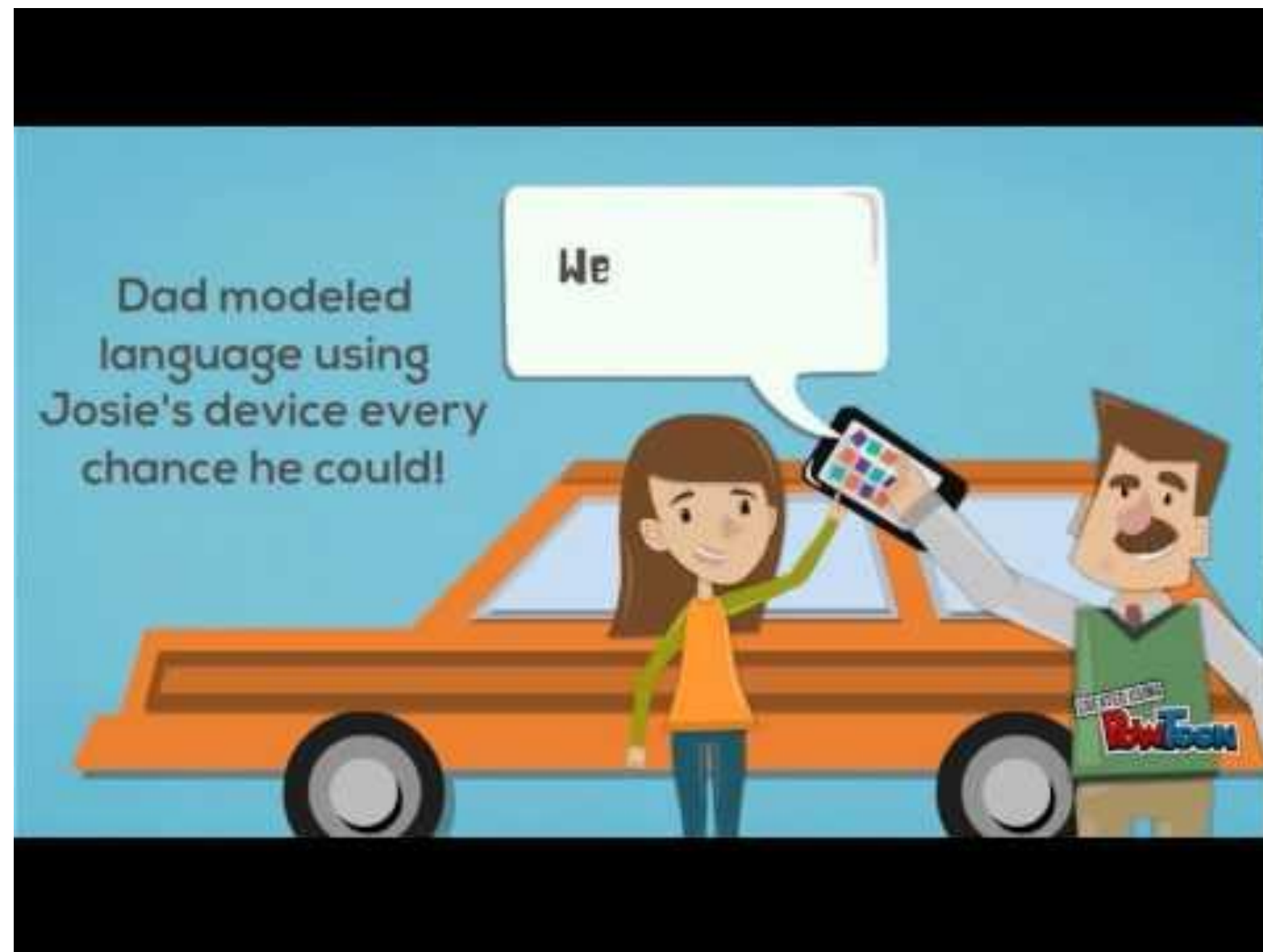
Focus on INPUT

Instead of focusing on **output** from the learner to measure success, focus on **how often you are giving INPUT on the system.**

Remember, we learn language from **models, exposure, and exploration**, NOT being told what to say and when to say it.



Aided Language Stimulation



Regulation Before Expectation

Aided Language Stimulation

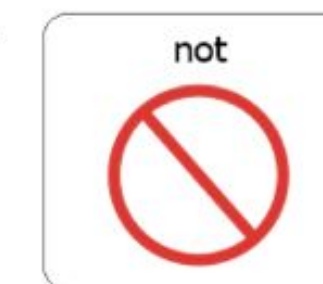
What is it?

- AAC Strategy in which a speaker points to and/or selects symbols/words that correspond to their spoken message.
 - You do not need to point to every word.
 - Start small- stay on one page, or focus on one word (think CORE)
- A way to provide language input that matches the expected output.
- Occurs in natural interactions/settings.
- AAC in context
- Occurs WITHOUT expectation of the learner using AAC back (remember autonomy)
- Supports comprehension of learners
- A way to give AAC learners the same thing we give typically developing speakers Immersion!
- Evidence Based Practice!



What it is NOT:

- NOT a PROMPT or CUE!
- Short term strategy
- We use ALS with fluent AAC users.



Modeling Without Expectation

FOCUS ON
TEACHING AND
EXPOSURE

LIMIT
QUESTIONS

PROVIDES LOTS
OF LANGUAGE
MODELS

Regulation Before Expectation

Modeling Without Expectation

What is it?

- When we communicate with AAC **without** expectation a particular response from the learner
- Environment of Aided Language Stimulation/ **Language Immersion**
- No prompts or cues (not, “say _____,” “find _____”, etc.)
- Remember- communication is not an interrogation. **Limit questions**

Why is it important?

- It is what we give children who speak.
- Respects and **supports the autonomy** of our learners – they get to pick when, how, and what they communicate.
- **Reduces cognitive load** and allows learner to observe without the pressure to respond.
- Greater **variety of language models** (not just question-answer)
- Establishes foundation for language learning while focusing on **connection**.

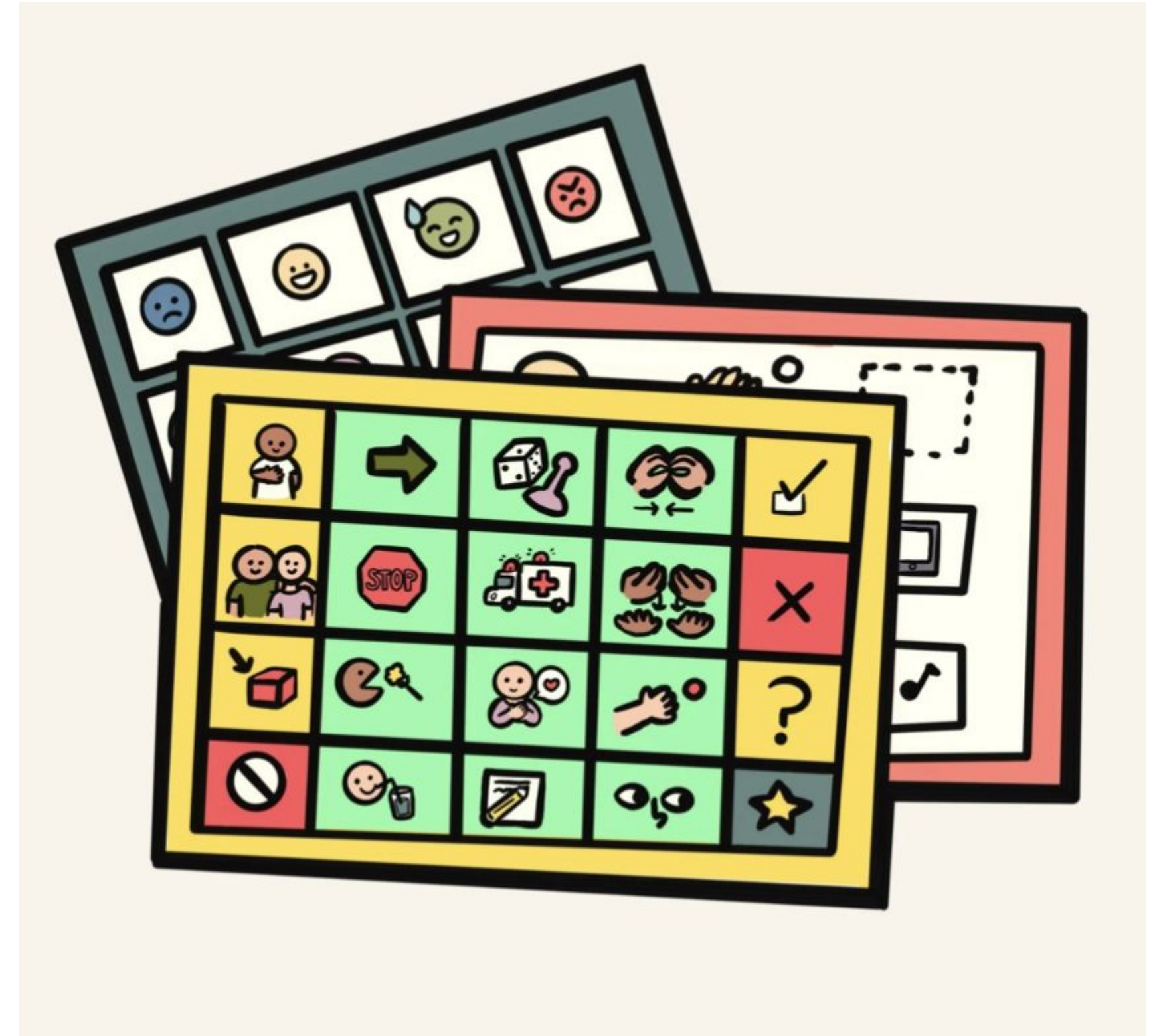
What does it look like?

- Making lots of **statements**, asking few questions
- Using AAC to **comment, reflect, describe**, etc.
- Describing learner’s actions and modeling related language by using “**maybe you...**” and “**I wonder if...**” statements.
- Not requiring learner to look at system.
- Continuing on, even if learner has stopped responding. **Keep the flow going!**
- Respecting learner’s right to communicate **what, when how** and to **whom** they want.

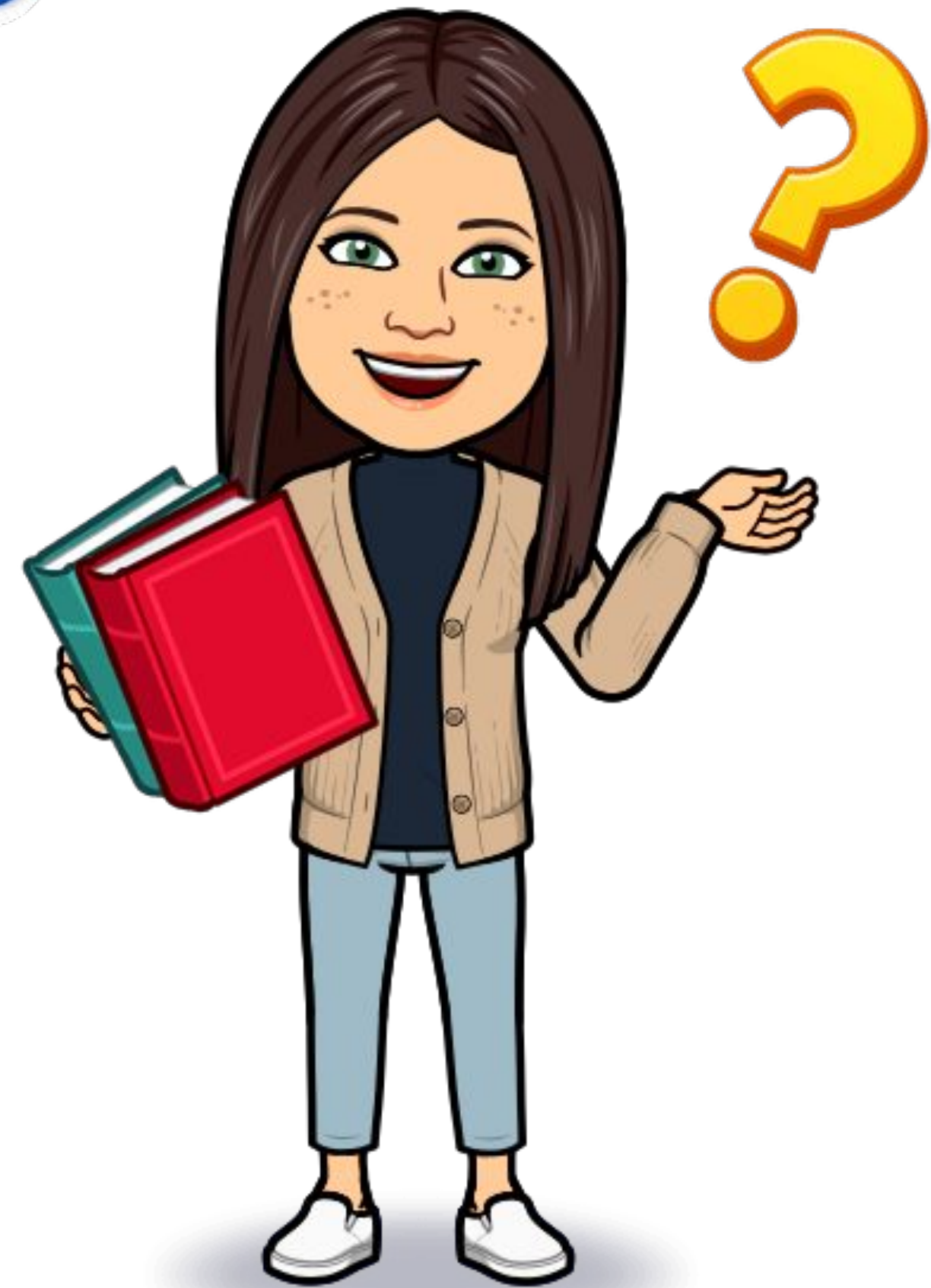


Let's Practice!

Using a communication board, practice Aided Language Stimulation to comment, describe, ask, answer, discuss, etc. on the following video.



Any Questions?



? ? ?
THOUGHTS?
? ? ?



References

- Charles, R., & Glennon, T. J. (2020). Understanding How School-Based OT Practitioners (OTPs) Perceive Sensory Integrative and Sensory-Based Interventions: Knowledge Base and Practical Application. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(4_Supplement_1), 7411505260p1. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74s1-po9800>
- Lcpsat. (2015, August 11). Aided language stimulation explained [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIFNMky22-U&t=3s>
- McLaughlin, K (2023). *Downloadable Resources*. The AAC Coach. <https://www.theaaccoach.com/resources>
- Neuroclastic (2021, August 14) Quote from Jake Reisman [Instagram post]. <https://www.instagram.com/neuroclastic/>
- Sossin, K., & Charone-Sossin, J. (2007). Embedding: Co-Regulation Within Therapeutic Process: Lessons from Development: Response to “Co-Regulated Interactions: Implications for Psychotherapy ...,” paper by Stanley Greenspan, *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychotherapy*, 6:3, 259-279, DOI: 10.1080/15289160701744247