

Evidence-Based Practice in Collaborative Early Intervention AAC Services in Inclusive Settings: Preparing SLPs and Special Educators
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What AAC for Infants and Toddlers?

AAC for very young children typically begins with low-tech options. Low-tech AAC includes a number of strategies designed to support infants and toddlers with physical disabilities and complex communication needs to communicate and to develop language. Children with disabilities that affect communication development are at risk of limited social participation and development in all aspects of learning. AAC includes both low and high tech devices from picture-based systems to computerized speech-output devices. For very young children, low-tech options are effective to begin building prelinguistic communication, emerging language, and developing skills.

Where can I learn more?

Background Resources and Ideas for Low-Tech AAC in Early Intervention

Assistive Technology Introduction, Supporting Early Education Development Systems,
Sacramento County Office of Education

<http://www.scoe.net/seeds/>

Tots 'n Tech Website: Great ideas for Low-Tech Communication Devices

http://www.asu.edu/clas/tnt/home_files/i_comm.html

Light, J. (2005) AAC Interventions to Maximize Language Development for Young Children AAC-RERC Web casts. Retrieved 1/6/05 from <http://www.aac-lerc.com/pages/news/webcasts2005.htm>

AACIntervention.com

<http://aacintervention.com/resources.htm>

This particular section of the larger AACIntervention.com website provides resources for EC professionals to create communication and visual environments for children through emerging literacy approaches. Links and key resources for where to begin with early AAC are listed including books and with demonstrated strategies by Patti King DeBaun, Carol Goosens, and Linda Burkhart.

Picture Sources for Low-Tech Communication Overlays

Picture Dictionary

<http://www.pdictionary.com/>

This Internet picture dictionary provides symbols with English and Spanish words that could be used in any communication or adapted book overlay. Have fun!

Ready-made Overlays for Activities and Story Participation

Dade County Schools: Boardmaker Story Overlays

http://prekese.dadeschools.net/resourcepages/resources_teacher_resource_room_main.htm

This is very extensive and very valuable for all ESE professionals, families, and providers!! Note: all created materials require BM for Windows to open and to use.

What are considerations to plan AAC in early intervention?

The use of AAC in early intervention requires an assessment by a team that includes the family, early intervention professionals, and specialists in AT and AAC. Following assessment and decisions made by the team, adaptations for communication and language development can be developed to meet the individual physical, sensory, communication, and cognitive needs of each child. In addition, the family preferences that may include diverse cultural and language backgrounds and daily activities need to be considered when choosing and designing AT for communication and language development. Janice Light (2005) has provided a helpful framework for early AAC goals for very young children, as follows:

1. Increase participation and build social interaction/turn taking.
2. Express range of communication functions.
3. Develop breadth of semantic concepts to support more diverse communication.
4. Build greater complexity of language structure to support more complex communication.
5. Build phonological awareness/foundations for literacy development.

Light's framework can be individualized to meet the needs of each child, based on assessment results to determine the types of AAC options needed.

What are some types of Low-Tech AAC?

Many types of Low-Tech AAC to support communication and some of the most common are listed below:

- Sign & gesture language
- Objects to promote choices
- Color photos of actual objects on display boards
- Communication books with photos of familiar toys, people, actions
- Colored line drawings in single or multiple display formats
- Single pictures attached with Velcro to familiar toys, places, activities throughout the home/school
- Voice output devices with single messages to promote participation: "My turn" in games
- Voice output devices with sequenced messages to promote participation in songs and stories
- Voice output devices with picture overlays to promote use of core vocabulary or key phonemes in words

Using Light's framework, the following table shows examples of Low-Tech AAC options to support communication and language development opportunities in daily activities for children with complex communication needs and/or physical disabilities:

Table 1. Examples of early AAC communication goals, activities, and low-tech aids.

Light's EI AAC Goals	Snack & Mealtime	Bath time	Story Book Reading	Circle/Music
Increase participation and build social interaction/turn taking.	Use sign language or gesture to request "more"	Talking picture frame with picture of child in bath and simple message to begin	Adapted story with Velcro-attached pictures or objects to remove.	Record message on "Big Mack" to enable child to say "My Turn" in circle time.
Express range of communication functions.	Laminated picture placemat provides choices for food	Suction-holder basket with pictures of bath toys for choices	Familiar story with predictable phrases, such as "Good Night Moon." Allow child to complete sentence, "Good night _____" and give picture to hold.	Record 3-4 messages on Tech 4 for child to choose favorite songs in circle time.
Develop breadth of semantic concepts to support more diverse communication.	Expand use of picture placemat to describe foods, textures	Expand use of pictures of bath toys to describe actions (wash, swim, float, wet/dry, etc.)	Record favorite story on sequenced voice output device, such as Step-by-Step and take turns "telling story" as child hits the switch.	Prepare object board to go with songs in circle time. Have child choose object to go with song, in response to question, "What tickles?" and child can choose object from board to feel & touch.
Build greater complexity of language structure to support more complex communication.	Use picture board at mealtime to build sentences, "I want more juice", "Tommy likes fish crackers", etc.	Laminated picture board near bathtub to model phrases about bath, "More water", "Blow bubbles", "Wash toes", etc.	Provide story overlay from favorite book (see websites for prepared overlays). Take turns pointing to pictures to tell the story and build short sentences.	Record song or other group activity on voice output device such as Go Talk or Tech 4 with sequenced steps. Provide turns for child to "say" parts of song or activity.
Build phonological awareness/foundations for literacy development.	Use pictures of foods that begin with same sound, emphasize P (popcorn, pizza, punch), etc.	Foam letter shapes to play with in bathtub. Emphasis sounds of bath time, "Pop", "Bubble", "Hot", "Boat" etc.	Read repeated line stories with sounds, the train goes "Choo Choo" and record on Tech 4. Allow child to hit switches and make sounds.	Record animal sounds in song such as "Old McDonald". Allow child to "say" sounds of animals at appropriate points in song.