

Thoughts on Augmentative and Alternative Communication Assessment

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The topic of assessment for individuals with limited speech who need augmentative and alternative (AAC) systems is a huge subject. Multiple day conferences have been held on the subject, with resource manuals published and training courses developed. For the very beginner in the field of AAC, it is important to note that an initial assessment is conducted to evaluate the person's speech and language skills and factors related specifically to operation and use of augmentative and alternative communication systems. Then, on-going assessments are conducted to outline the person's progress in his/her communication development.

General Speech and Language Assessment: A speech and language assessment needs to be conducted for any person being considered for an AAC system. It is necessary to document the person's oral-motor skills, receptive language comprehension, expressive language production, and communication interaction skills. While some testing materials and standards may need to be modified for a person with limited to no oral speech skills, many tools and strategies commonly used with speaking children can be used to evaluate a person with limited speech skills.

Evaluation for an AAC System or Device: A speech-language pathologist is generally the team leader for assessment that are conducting for the purpose of recommending a specific AAC system. All speech-language pathologists are ethically mandated to follow the guidelines set out by ASHA in regards to practice in the field of AAC, including the AAC Assessment Process. ASHA has published papers about AAC Assessment and Practice that should be read and applied by SLPs practicing in the area of AAC. (<http://www.asha.org/slp/clinical/aac/>) In addition, many states provide specific assessment guidelines in order to meet standards for state funding of an AAC device.

Cautions: Recommendations for specific AAC systems need to be based on objective and subjective evidence gathered during the evaluation. It is unethical to select an AAC device or system for an individual based on personal preferences, policies, price, or promotions.

1. Personal Preferences:
 - a. *I like the THINGAMAJIG, so that's what I recommend for all my students.*
 - b. *I never use the THINGAMAJIG because I don't understand how it works.*
2. Policies:
 - a. *Our school uses the THINGAMAJIG with all our students because it is easier to support students all using the same system.*
 - b. *Our facility has an agreement with the makers of the THINGAMAJIG.*
3. Price:
 - a. *We can only afford to buy a THINGAMAJIG.*
 - b. *We want to use a free or low cost THINGAMAJG app.*
4. Promotions:
 - a. *I looked at all the devices at the AT show and picked out a THINGAMAJIG for my student.*
 - b. *I watched a bunch of videos on YouTube and decided on the THINGAMAJIG for my student.*
 - c. *I met some AAC device users using the THINGAMAJIG and choose that for my student.*

d. I saw a TV show on the THINGAMAJIG and want it for my child.

The following resources provide information on AAC and AAC Assessment.

AAC Institute: <http://www.aac institute.org/welcometoaacissp.html>

Offers self-study courses at NO COST for CEUs.

- Introduction to AAC
- Language-Based Approach to AAC Assessment and Intervention
- AAC Symbols and Language Representation Methods
- AAC Performance Report: Definition, Generation, and Use

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association:

<http://www.asha.org/eweb/OLSDynamicPage.aspx?Site=ashacms&Webcode=olsresults&tpc=ac>

Provides a range of products related to AAC for members and nonmembers of ASHA

Assistive Technology Industry Association:

<http://www.atia.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=4381>

Offers webinars in the area of AAC and Assistive Technology

The following tool is recommended to assist in ongoing assessment of students using AAC systems: *Augmentative & Alternative Communication Profile A Continuum of Learning* by Dr. Tracy Kovach, Available from LinguSystems for \$69.95.

<http://www.linguisystems.com/products/product/display?itemid=10547>