

USING AAC WITH BIRTH-THREE

Heather Atkins, MS, CCC-SLP

THE MULTIPLE FUNCTIONS OF A TODDLER'S LANGUAGE

When facilitating language in toddlers, the function of “requesting” is usually where we begin. However, there is much more to the language of a toddler than requesting. Toddlers also use language to protest, share ideas or label objects, participate in common activities, socialize with others, etc.

When we use AAC with toddlers, we must think about all functions of communication and not limit AAC use to requesting only. Requesting can be a powerful way to start the AAC experience and a nice way to teach means-end. However, a good AAC system should allow children to expand the use of their language for multiple purposes.

WHEN TO BEGIN INTRODUCING AAC

When should you start considering AAC for an infant and toddler? Consider using AAC when: a child is not able to communicate effectively with words, a child is not attempting to communicate with others, a child's vocabulary or expressive means are limited, or a future delay in speech/language is expected. Many of us use sign language, a form of AAC, to help facilitate spoken language. Sign language can be introduced early, before a child turns one. However, sign language is not a match for all children or their families. Where do we go then?

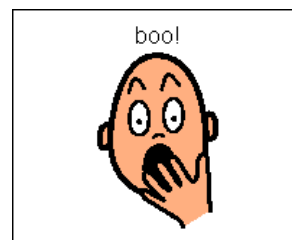
WHERE TO BEGIN WITH AAC DEVICES

A good place to start is with a single voice-output switch, such as a Big Mack. Choose an activity or object the child already enjoys and incorporate the use of the switch to request/participate. Work on one activity until the child has shown that he understands activating the switch created a response. Be patient. This may take several weeks for some children.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

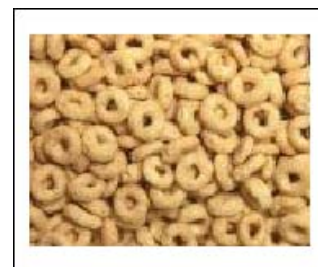
- Peek –a –boo

Record “boo” on the device. Hide under a blanket and when the child hits the device, jump out.



- Snack time

Record “cheerios” on the device. Give him a few cheerios and help him activate the device to request more.



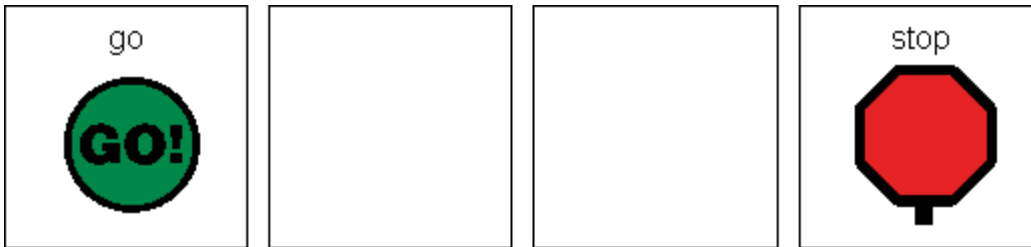
WHAT'S NEXT?

A child has mastered the single switch device. What's next? Making choices. To make choices we need to consider the impulsivity, motor control, visual scanning, and comprehension of a child. To start offering another choice, try two single switches or a rocking switch. If you feel the child will quickly understand this concept, you may choose to introduce a four cell option, such as the CheapTalk 4. You can start by just offering two choices on the CheapTalk.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Stop and Go

Start a favorite activity (bouncing, singing) and have the child control when you "stop" or "go."



- Simple choices

Let the child choose between two favorite activities. You may need to teach each symbol individually at first.



ADDING MORE VOCABULARY

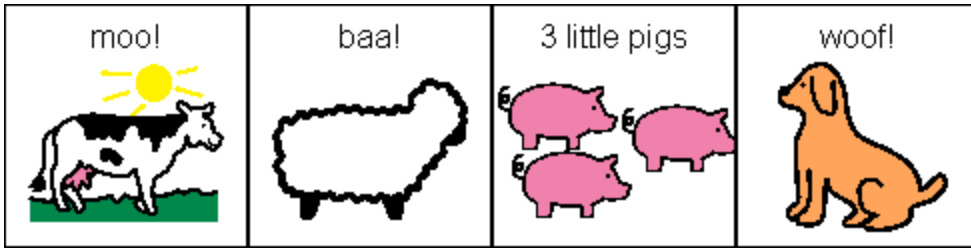
The child has shown that he can make purposeful selections using the AT device. What other activities can be done to build vocabulary and enhance communication skills? Think about what activities the child enjoys. AAC can be used to help the child interact socially during those activities. It can also provide a child the control that many toddlers seek.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

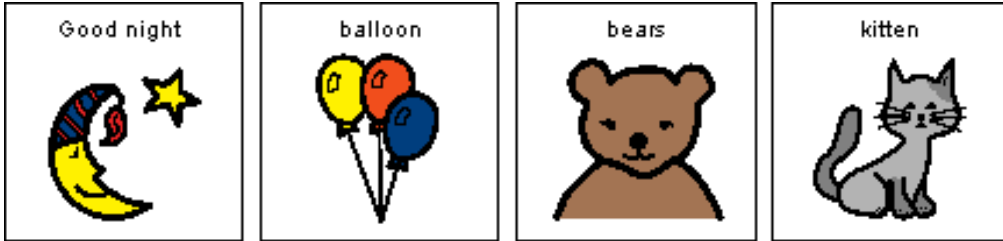
- Books

Look through the child's favorite book and choose some words from the book that will help him "read" the story.

Repetitive phrases are a nice way to start combining two PECs together (ex. Goodnight + moon).



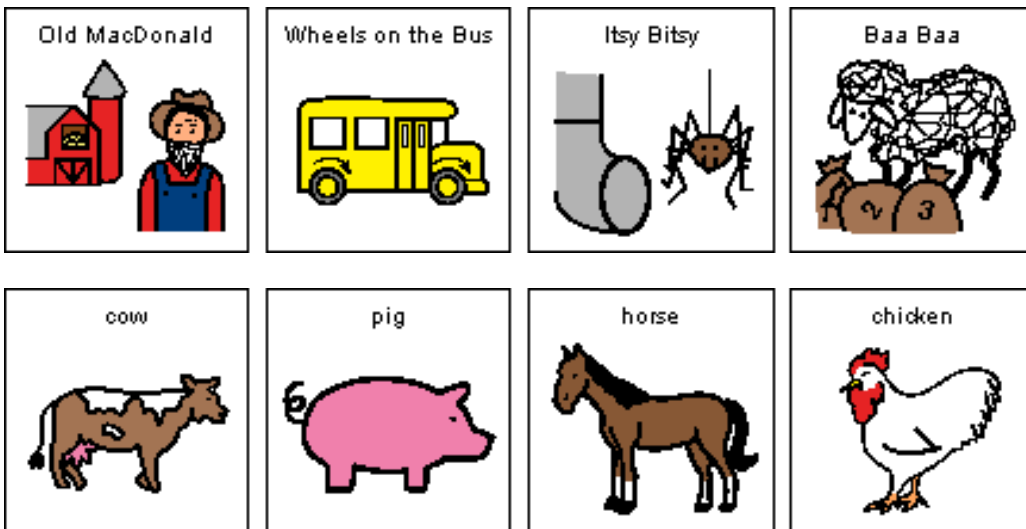
(“Moo, Ba, Lalala” by Sandra Boynton)



(“Good Night Moon” by Margaret Wise Brown)

- Songs

The child can select which song he would like to hear. Also, he could choose which phrase to sing next when the adults pause.



- TV shows

Yes, even television shows can be an interactive activity if we get creative. Some shows actually pause and wait for children to respond. AAC can allow a child a way to participate with words.



(Dora the Explorer)

