

Empowering Parents: Strategies for Speech Pathologists in AAC Trials and Interventions

Emily Churchill
Jo Beech

Short Abstract

This presentation offers practical strategies for speech pathologists to empower parents during Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) trials and ongoing interventions. We explore key factors contributing to successful AAC assessment and implementation process, emphasizing the critical role of parental involvement.

Recent research on device abandonment highlights the need for speech pathologists to consider parents as integral to the trial and intervention process. By placing parents in the "driver's seat," we can aim to significantly improve outcomes and reduce the risk of AAC device abandonment.

Our talk introduces evidence-based techniques for empowering and preparing parents throughout the AAC journey to be making informed decisions. We share practical resources and tools that speech pathologists can immediately incorporate into their practice. These include resources adapted for parents, strategies to include the parent throughout the assessment and trial process and enabling them to choose suitable options to trial and/or purchase. These strategies aim to enhance parent confidence, improve device usage, and ultimately lead to better communication outcomes for AAC communicators.

The presentation includes experiences and opinions from parents and carers about their AAC journey: finding the right AAC system(s) and strategies that have been effective for them.

By the end of this presentation, attendees will have resources to add to their AAC toolkit to effectively engage parents in AAC trials and interventions, fostering a collaborative approach that benefits both families and practitioners.

Long Abstract

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) interventions play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for individuals with complex communication needs. However, the success of these interventions heavily relies on consistent and effective implementation, which often faces challenges leading to device abandonment (Light & McNaughton, 2015). This presentation addresses this critical issue by focusing on empowering parents as key partners in the AAC journey, presenting evidence-based strategies for speech pathologists to enhance parental involvement and improve long-term outcomes.

Recent research has highlighted the significant impact of parental involvement on the success of AAC interventions (Biggs et al., 2019). By positioning parents as central figures in the assessment, implementation, and ongoing use of AAC systems, speech pathologists can dramatically improve the likelihood of successful outcomes and reduce the risk of device abandonment (Moorcroft et al., 2019). This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of AAC interventions but also promotes a more supportive and conducive environment for communication development.

Drawing from both clinical experience and current research, we present a toolkit of practical resources and techniques that speech pathologists can immediately incorporate into their practice. These tools are aimed at enhancing parent education, facilitating home-based implementation, and promoting ongoing engagement with AAC systems (Mandak et al., 2017). By equipping parents with the necessary skills and knowledge, we aim to create a more sustainable and effective AAC intervention model.

A unique aspect of our presentation is the inclusion of first-hand experiences and insights from parents and caregivers who have navigated the AAC journey. These personal accounts provide valuable perspectives on the challenges faced by families and the strategies that have proven most effective in real-world settings. By sharing these experiences, we aim to bridge the gap between clinical practice and family needs, fostering a more empathetic and tailored approach to AAC interventions.

This presentation aims to inspire a shift in how speech pathologists approach AAC interventions, emphasizing the power of parental involvement to drive better outcomes for individuals with complex communication needs. By empowering parents as true partners in the AAC process, we can work towards more effective, sustainable, and life-changing communication interventions.

References

Biggs, E. E., Carter, E. W., & Gilson, C. B. (2019). A scoping review of the involvement of children's communication partners in aided augmentative and alternative communication modeling interventions. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 28(2), 743-758.

Light, J., & McNaughton, D. (2015). Designing AAC research and intervention to improve outcomes for individuals with complex communication needs. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 31(2), 85-96.

Mandak, K., O'Neill, T., Light, J., & Fosco, G. M. (2017). Bridging the gap from values to actions: a family systems framework for family-centered AAC services. *Augmentative and alternative communication*, 33(1), 32–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618.2016.1271453>

Moorcroft, A., Scarinci, N., & Meyer, C. (2019). A systematic review of the barriers and facilitators to the provision and use of low-tech and unaided AAC systems for people with complex communication needs and their families. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, 14(7), 710-731.

