



Be Responsive: 5 ways to show you are listening

(when modeling AAC)

RESPONSIVE:

receptive to, flexible, sensitive to, sympathetic to, aware of

1. Repeat/Recast for clarity or confirmation

Interactions with young children are characterized by natural exchanges in which caregivers repeat utterances, recast utterances with improved sentence structure, or expand on what the child is saying by adding more information. This serves to foster engagement, to seek clarification, or to confirm the message was heard as it was intended. In all instances the individual is receiving meaningful feedback about her communicative attempt. Such exchanges provide important learning to develop communication skills.

2. Reflect and validate

Affirm communicative attempts offered through gestures, facial expressions, body language, vocalizations, verbalizations, and AAC, even when the message is unclear or the “answer” is not accurate. Assign meaning to the attempt. This teaches the individual his communicative attempts are observable and meaningful, and validates the effort. This can help avert difficult behaviors for some. For others it may foster autonomy and sense of self. For instance if a child is vocalizing loudly, suggest “I see you are trying to get my attention.” If an utterance seems unrelated to the topic at hand use statements such as “I wonder if you are thinking about (topic related to what the child said/did)”.

3. Pause and offer wait time/think time

Think of wait time as THINK time! Increased processing time improves the nature of the interaction. It elicits more thoughtful statements, questions and responses from BOTH communication partners. Many students exhibit delayed processing or compromised motor planning. Wait time provides space and time for information, ideas, and responses to settle and formulate. Remember, verbal or physical interruption during moments of “wait time” may re-set the individual’s processing, requiring even more wait time.

Unpacking AAC Implementation

4. Show engagement. Be multi-modal. Engage reciprocally.

An engaged communication partner is attentive, uses and responds to multiple modalities, and provides expectant pauses to provide openings for the individual who uses AAC to respond without requiring a response. Support is provided with an appropriate and meaningful level of prompting. Rapport is established with a tone that is respectful, demonstrates interest in the individual, and is considerate of her personal state of being.

5. Give an out!

“NO!” is a valid response. Give students the opportunity to indicate “I don’t know, I don’t want to, I don’t like, go away, or I want something different.” Refusal and negation are powerful communicative functions. They allow individuals to exert control over their world, an important component of self-actualization. Individuals require support to learn how to communicate their own thoughts, ideas and preferences, which may differ from what is intended or offered by a communication partner. “NO” is essential for fostering authentic interactions.