



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders OAFCCD

AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION

Research tells us that an outstanding amount of learning takes place in the first five years of life, much more so than we previously thought. Children start using “recognizable” language at around twelve months of age (if not sooner), as they learn more and more about themselves and their world (home) and the people in it - mum-mum, dad-dad. These are building blocks of language.

If a child fails in his first attempts to communicate, frustrations mount and confidence never gets a chance to bloom. Expressing needs, wants and ideas, and sharing fun and sorrow are basic human needs at all ages.

If natural speech is not present, augmentative communication systems can often help - either by acting as a bridge until speech develops or by providing an alternative if speech does not develop.

Augmentative communication refers to any communication approach designed to support or augment an individual’s communication output including:

- any natural voice or speech available
- body language - touching, shrugging, pointing, eye contact, facial expression, pantomime
- manual sign language
- picture and symbol displays
- technological aids - computers, voice output communication aids
- print

Children learn to talk through hearing others talk to them. Children who are expected to use an augmentative communication system need to have models of how to do this. Sign to your child as much as possible when you talk to him, point to pictures on his display, use communication device yourself.

Advocate and educate others. Many non-verbal children will become non-verbal adults. Help prepare the world, in which they will find themselves in twenty years, to be a knowledgeable and accepting place. Being visible and active is critical.

Let your child talk in your presence. Don’t always talk for your child - even when this might be easier and faster. Training them now to ask for and pay for their popsicle at the variety store may develop the necessary skills and confidence to do their own grocery shopping as an adult. Expect the best from your child whatever their skill level. Regardless of special needs, as an adult they’ll assume the same desires, goals and expectations as their peers. Help them to develop positive “I can” image. Help them to see themselves as responsible and productive members of society.

Source: Article based on materials developed by Geraldine Schram, S.L.P., for Hamilton Wentworth Communication Collective