

# Using Assistive Technologies to Support Speech and Language in Early Intervention

Foster speech development in children receiving **Early Intervention Services**, and allow them to access language development and functional communication using: **Augmentative and Alternative Communication**, a.k.a.: **AAC**

## F.A.Q. about AAC

*#1 “Will access to an AAC system discourage speech development?”*

- AAC systems can actually help with speech development.
- Research indicates that 89% of individuals using AAC across multiple studies have shown increases in speech, with the remaining individuals using AAC demonstrating no changes<sup>1</sup>.
- Emerging evidence shows that access to an AAC system provides opportunities for language development and can actually encourage *speech* development.
- A recent comparison of 68 toddlers showed that children whose intervention sessions incorporated AAC demonstrated a higher increase in vocabulary and in spoken words than children receiving spoken communication intervention only<sup>2</sup>.

*#2 “Aren’t there certain prerequisite skills that a child must demonstrate before he/she can be considered a candidate for AAC?”*

- AAC is anything other than speech that a child might use to communicate, including: gaze, gestures and vocalizations, as well as communication boards and voice output systems.
- Cognitive and linguistic development in children is a gradual process.
- Children learn how to communicate as caregivers respond to early behaviors such as crying, and cooing. Consistent responses to these behaviors are what teach a child that they have power over their environment through communication.
- Through exposure to language and practice making sounds, children learn that spoken words are symbols for their referents.
- This process can take place in any modality, including AAC!

*#3 “Don’t we need to give our clients a chance to develop speech before introducing an AAC system?”*

- For children who aren’t meeting their communication needs through speech, it is important to supplement their abilities through use of multiple communication methods.
- Providing a method to supplement speech facilitates a child’s language development, which is also the responsibility of the SLP.
- Considering the evidence that AAC may actually encourage speech development, there is no good reason to wait for children in early intervention to experience communication failure before providing them with access to AAC!

<sup>1</sup>Millar, D., Light, J., & Schlosser, R. (2006). The impact of augmentative and alternative communication intervention on speech production of individuals with developmental disabilities: A research review. *Journal of speech, language and hearing research*, 49, 248-264.

- <sup>2</sup> Romski, M., Sevcik, R., Adamson, B., Cheslock, M., Smith, A., Barker, R., & Bakeman, R. (2010). Randomized comparison of augmented and nonaugmented language interventions for toddlers with developmental delays and their parents. *Journal of speech, language and hearing research, 53*, 350-364.
- <sup>3</sup> Cress, C., & Marvin, C. (2003). Common questions about AAC services in early intervention. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 19*(4), 254-272.