

The University of New Mexico

Building Success with AAC: The Devil is in the Details

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Overview for Today

- Why the Title?
 - *It's the little things... that turn out to be not so little*
- Morning Session
 - Troubleshooting Techniques for Clients who use AAC
- Afternoon
 - Selecting Skills to Teach Communication Partners
 - Teaching Rule-Based Language to Children who use AAC: Research Update

Overview of Troubleshooting

- Where do I start?
 - Tips for getting started with AAC solutions
- Troubleshooting
 - Client isn't interested in communicating
 - Client isn't making progress
 - Client is inconsistent
 - Client demonstrates challenging behaviors
- Providing Communication Opportunities
 - Essential but often overlooked

Where do I start?

□ Tips for getting started with AAC solutions

Key Question 1:

- How is the client currently communicating?

Key Question 2:

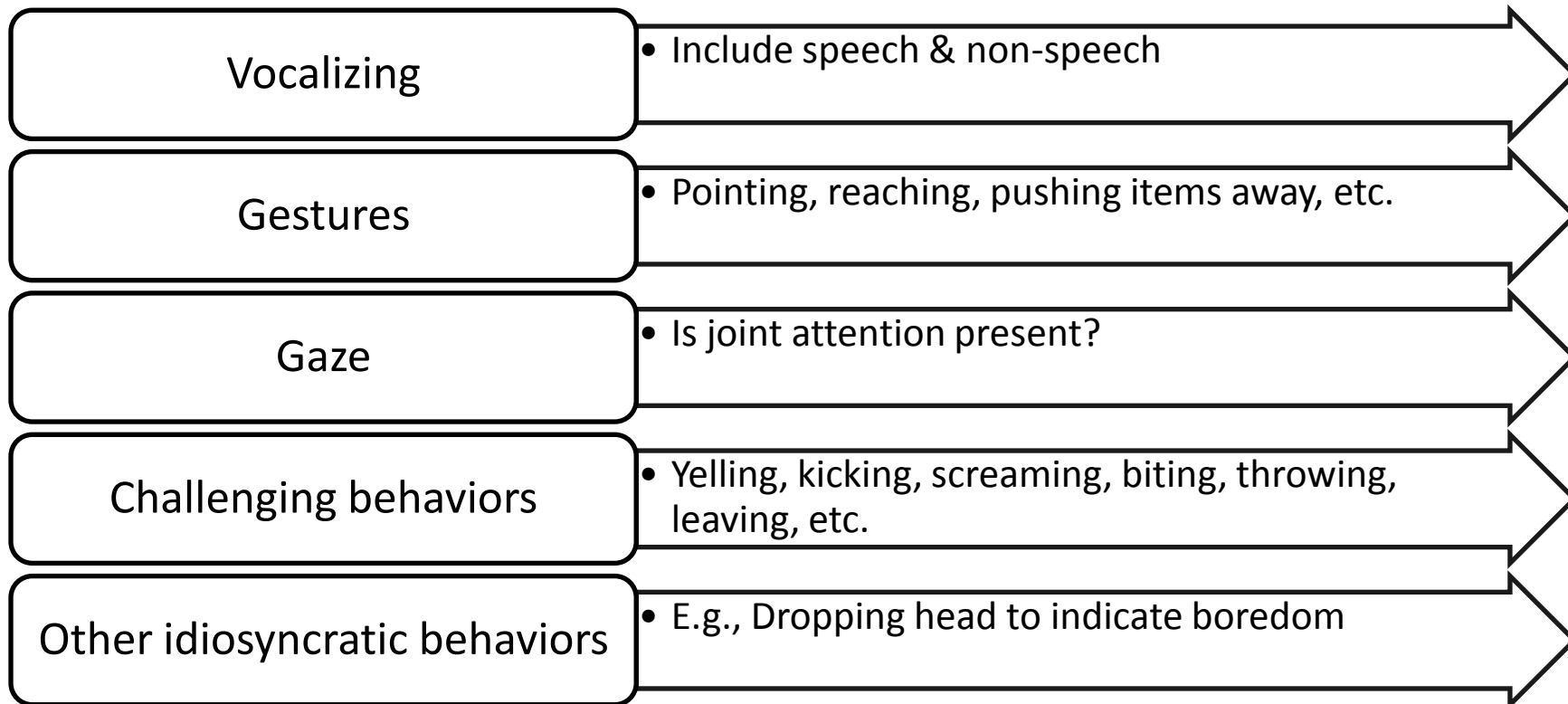
- What is the client trying to communicate?

Key Question 3:

- Are the client's current communication modes appropriate, efficient, and effective?

Key Question 1

- ▣ How is the client currently communicating?
- ▣ Make a list of current communication modes



Key Question 2

- What is the client trying to communicate?
 - Start by shaping **current** communicative behaviors (rather than teaching brand new ones)
 - Examine **communicative functions; e.g.:**

Rejecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g., undesired objects, events, or transitions
Requesting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g., desired objects, people, or activities• E.g., something surprising happens and the client looks at you to see if you noticed it too
Commenting on events	

Where do I start?

- Make a list of how these things match up
 - See next slide

Communication Act	Modes of Communication					
	Vocalization/ speech	Facial expression	Gesture	Manual sign	Graphic Symbol	AAC device
Request food item for snack	X		X reaches		X hand over hand	
Request drink for snack	X		X reaches		X hand over hand	
Requests participation with peers for floor play time	X whines	X	X reaches toward peers			
Rejects food			X throws			
Rejects people	X cries		X turns head			
Comments on sound of school bell indicating it's time to change classes		X looks expectantly at teacher				

Key Question 3

- Are these methods of communication
 - Efficient?
 - Effective?
 - Appropriate?
- Any communicative attempts that do not meet these 3 criteria are an excellent place to start

Example Child #1

1. Current communication
 - Frequently cries
 - Also can: vocalize, use gaze, touch desired object, reach toward nearby objects
 2. Intent of a specific communicative act (**pragmatic function**)
 - Gain attention; typically does this by crying
 3. Is this efficient, effective, and socially appropriate?
 - Does not meet all 3 criteria; something to work on
-
- Potential communication options
 - Access a message that says, “Please come here” (***IF*** the child is symbolic)
 - Pointing toward partner, vocalizing, and making eye contact
 - The latter may well be highly preferable!!! Not just about technology solutions
 - Maximize use of unaided modes for simple communicative functions

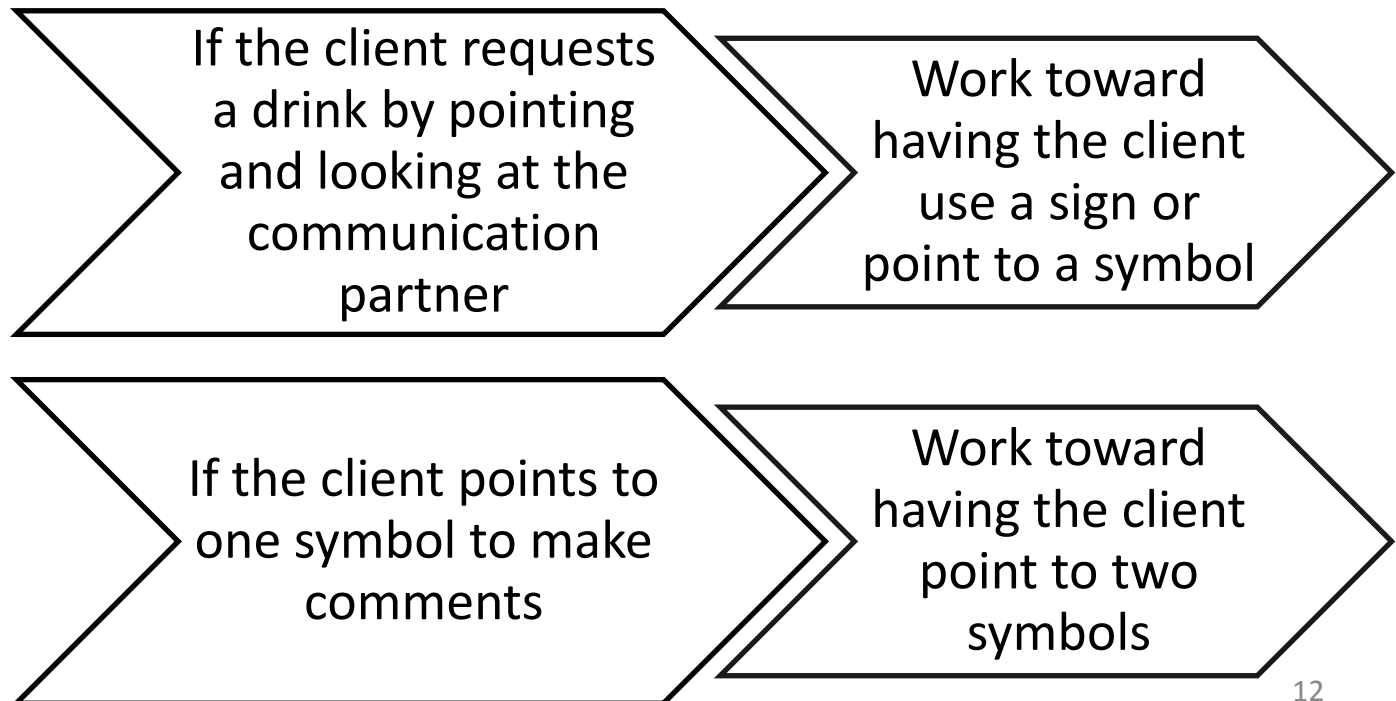
Example Child #2

1. Current communication
 - Yells & cries, throws objects, pounds objects on surfaces, points, has a few manual signs
 2. Intent of a specific communicative act (**pragmatic function**)
 - Rejecting undesired objects by throwing them
 3. Is this efficient, effective, and socially appropriate?
 - It's efficient and effective, but not socially appropriate
- Potential options
 - Push the item away
 - Access a message that says, “I don't want that”
 - This MUST be made as easy to do as throwing things!

Analyzing the data

If the client is effective, efficient, and socially appropriate

- May not need to change anything, or
- May teach higher level options for communication
- Examples:



Analyzing the data

*If the client is **socially inappropriate***

- Replace with a more appropriate option
 - For example: If the client currently rejects food by throwing it, replace with

Pushing the food away

Hitting a button that says, “I don’t want that”

Or another appropriate behavior

- ▣ Must **reinforce** this new behavior consistently!

Analyzing the data

*If the client **has no way to communicate something***

- First, ensure the client is **motivated**
 - For example, does she **like** the food item being offered?
 - If so, teach requesting
 - If not, might use this to teach rejecting

Analyzing the data

If the client has no way to communicate something (con't)

- Second, teach the client to direct an unaided behavior toward a person
 - For example, looking at the communication partner and then at the food item
 - If the client is not directing communication at a person, do not use signs or graphic symbols yet!

Analyzing the data

When to start working with symbols

- Once the client is directing communicative behaviors toward a person
 - She **is** communicating
 - Can begin to introduce symbolic means of communication
 - Consider multiple options

Signs

Line drawings

Photographs

Voice output device

Analyzing the data

Selecting communicative behaviors for/with the client

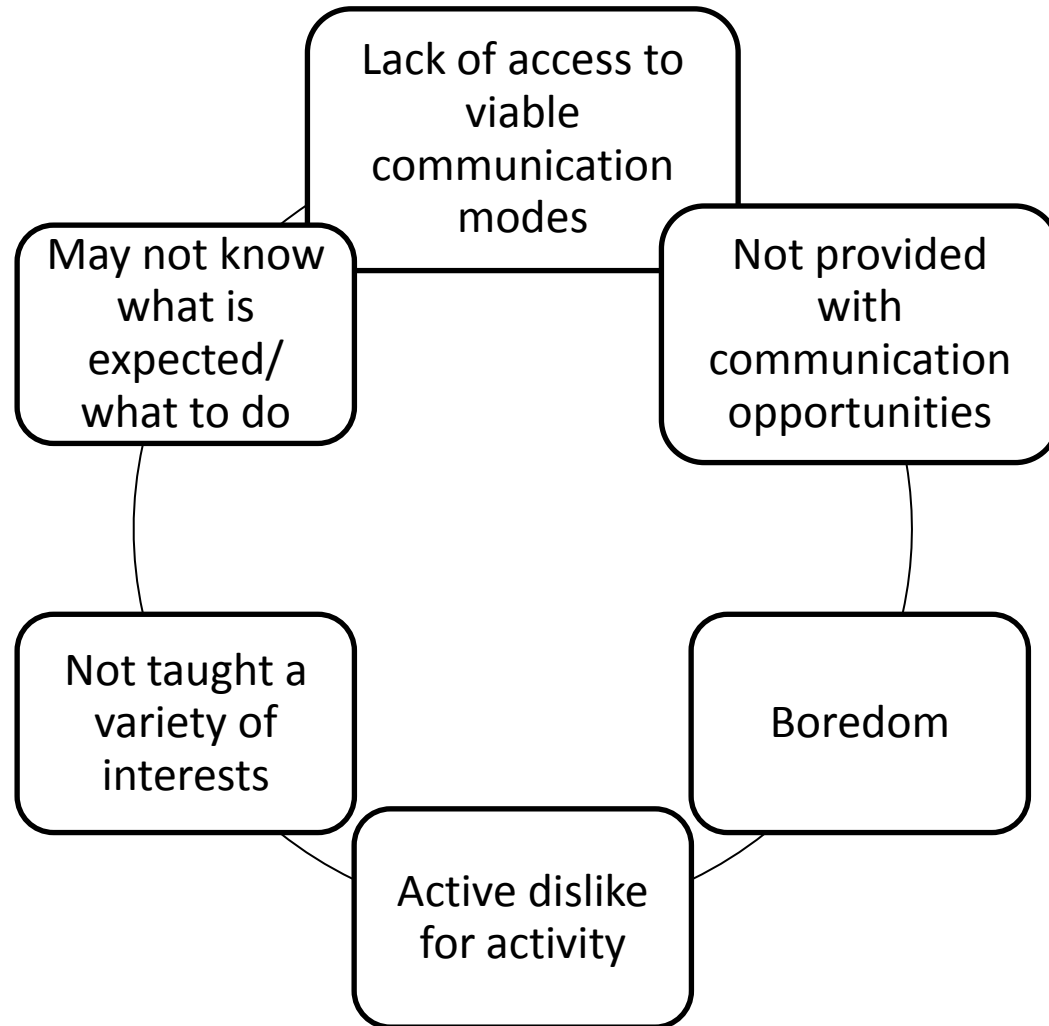
- Once the client is directing communicative behaviors toward a person, ensure that
 - The communicative behavior is
 - Efficient, effective, and socially appropriate
 - Everyone
 - Knows what behavior is expected in that situation
 - Is immediately responding to that behavior

Overview of Troubleshooting

- Possible Client Issues

- Lacks interest in communicating
- Is not making progress
- Is inconsistent
 - With each communication partner
 - Within each situation
 - From one day to the next
- Is demonstrating challenging behaviors

Lack of Interest in Communication

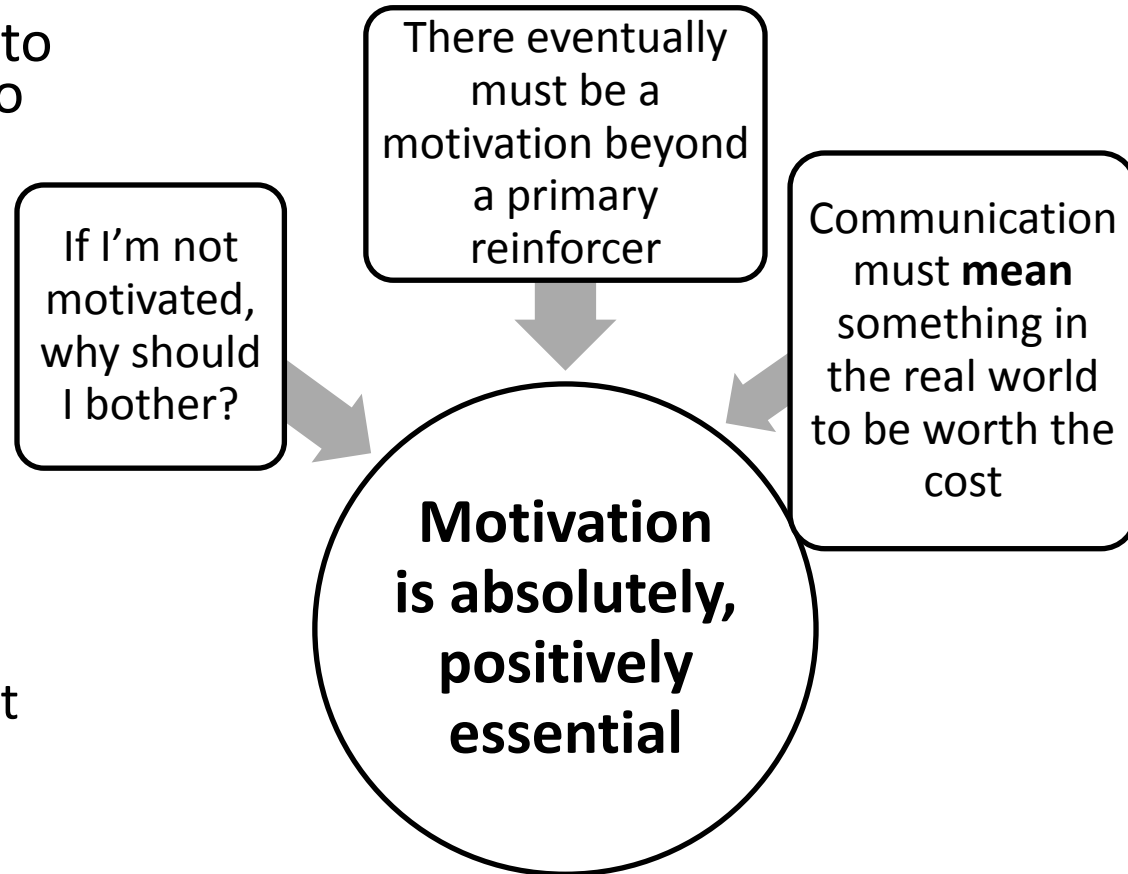


Lack of Access & Opportunity

- Lack of access to viable communication modes
 - Can be true for symbolic or pre-symbolic communicators
 - Client needs an effective, efficient way to communicate
 - Consider use of all possible communication modes
- Not provided with communication opportunities
 - More on this later today

Boredom

- Children with severe physical disabilities need to have the world brought to them
- They need motivating activities to keep their minds stimulated, just as other children do
- Need something motivating to talk about!
 - Communication is effortful
 - It **MUST** be worth the “cost” to make the effort



Active Dislike

- These are good opportunities to teach children how to reject in a socially appropriate manner
- For example: If a client tends to throw items he does not like, teach him to:

Sign “no”, *or*

Touch a line drawing that stands for “I don’t like that”, *or*

Hold up his hand to protest, *or*

Gently push the item away

Lack of Interests

- Not 'taught' a variety of interests
 - Some children with severe mental impairments may demonstrate few interests
 - Need to teach them how to enjoy activities
 - For example, provide **repeated** exposures to:
 - Different people (make request to have certain people with them)
 - Different types of music, games, activities
 - Different types of food

Lack of Knowledge

- May not know what to do
 - **Model** appropriate responses for the client
 - Can demonstrate appropriate responses by having other people use AAC
 - Peer models are great
- Medicines also can interfere

Lack of Progress

May be aiming too high

- Simplify the task
- Break the task down into more steps
 - Being a good task analyzer is $\frac{1}{2}$ the job of being a good clinician
- Back up to an earlier phase of development

May be aiming too low

- They may be bored!
The vocabulary you have provided may be
- Inappropriate
 - Uninteresting
 - Motivation is essential!

Lack of Progress

- May not be appropriate for the client
 - For example: The client might not have the motor abilities to easily access the AAC device
- Should NOT have the SAME goals year after year
 - Write attainable goals, however minor the progress may seem
 - Much better to document SOME progress on a modest goal than no progress on a more ambitious goal

Inconsistent Performance

- Look for **PATTERNS** of when client does and does not perform behavior
- Does the client perform differently when the aided AAC device is placed in different locations?
- Has the aided AAC device been changed in any way recently?
 - Symbols moved to a different location
 - New pages added
 - It take time to re-learn these things

Inconsistent Performance

- Has the communication context changed?
 - May have difficulty generalizing across
 - People
 - Contexts
 - Activities
 - For example:
 - Rejecting a person is different from rejecting an object
 - Requesting food is different from requesting another object or requesting a person

Inconsistent Performance

- Performance can vary because of differences in:
 - Partners
 - Clients may simply like some partners better than others
 - Settings/Tasks
 - May vary because of like/dislike for certain settings/tasks
 - Demands may be different across settings/tasks
 - Days
 - We all have good days and bad days!
 - Time of day may make a difference as well

- If client has variable performance with the same partner in the same setting on the same day
 - May be bored
 - For example: The client doesn't WANT to request the music again
 - May need to offer more choices for communication
 - Again: Motivation is a key factor
 - May need to offer fewer choices
 - May be tired

Challenging Behaviors



- ❑ May be injuring themselves
- ❑ May be injuring others

Causes of Challenging Behaviors

- Most often, children with severe disabilities exhibit challenging behaviors because they are experiencing **communication** failures
 - They do not have an effective means of communication
 - Their communication partners are not consistently responding to their communicative attempts

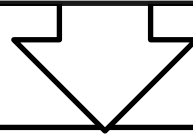
Remediating Challenging Behaviors

- Functional Communication Training (Dunlap & Duda)
 - <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb11.pdf>
- Identify the purpose of the challenging behavior
 - When and why is the client acting out?
- Teach an appropriate behavior that will achieve the same result

Challenging Behaviors: ABC

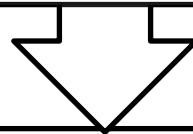
Antecedent

What immediately preceded the challenging behavior?



Behavior

Describe the challenging behavior (kicking, throwing, etc.)



Consequence

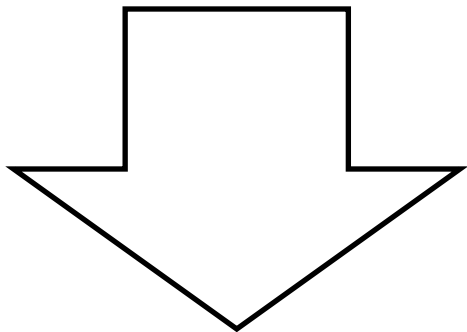
What happened immediately following the behavior?

Challenging Behaviors: *Antecedent*

- Determine what prompts the client to exhibit the behavior
- This should tell you what the client is trying to communicate
 - Avoid or escape an undesirable situation
 - Request an activity
 - Request social contact
 - Etc.

Challenging Behaviors: *Behavior*

- Look at the challenging behavior as a communication mode

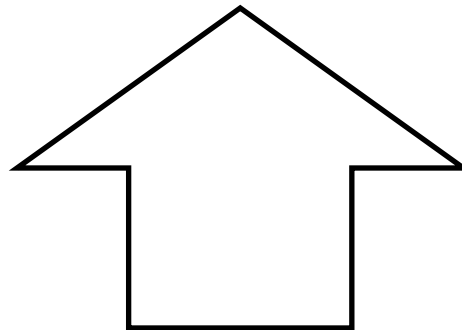


If is not socially appropriate, but the client is trying to communicate something

- Examples

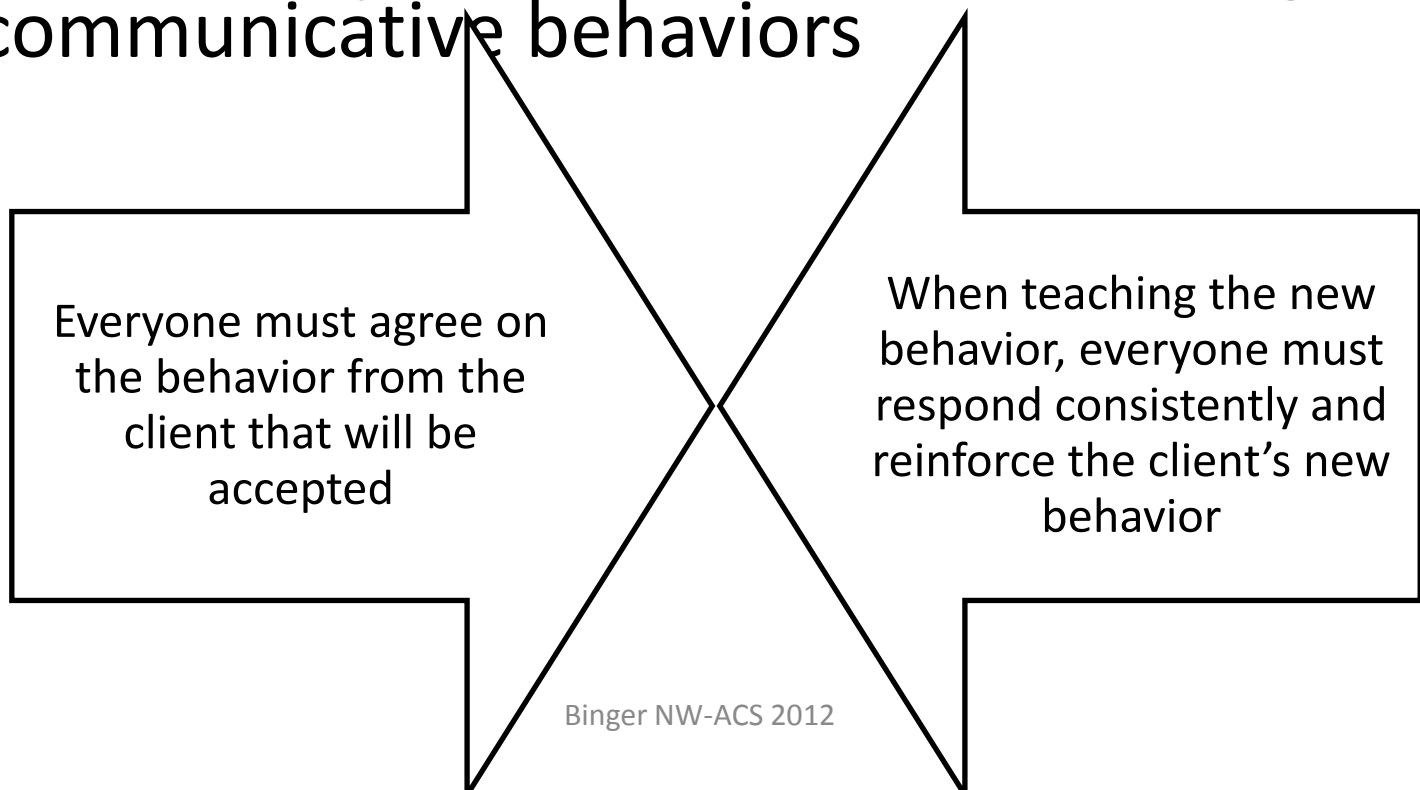
- Pushing food away instead of throwing it
- Hitting a button that says, “No thank you” or “I want something else”

Select another communication mode that is equally **efficient**, **effective**, and **socially appropriate**



Challenging Behaviors: *Consequence*

- Often, communication partners are not responding *consistently* to the client's communicative attempts
- Consistency is essential when teaching new communicative behaviors



Challenging Behaviors: *Consequence*

Give the client a non-desired food item, **and** use hand-over-hand



IMMEDIATELY remove the food item



Fade the hand-over-hand cue as quickly as possible

- To teach him to push it away, *or*
- To hit a button that says “No thank you”

Let's Take Some Extra Time to Examine: **Providing Communication Opportunities**

- Let's start by looking at two videos
- Notice differences with
 - What the teacher is doing
 - What the child is doing

Providing Communication Opportunities

● What the teachers are doing differently

Providing an expectation for communication

Providing extra wait time; Many people who use AAC have delayed language processing

Providing models using the communication mode the child is expected to use

Asking who, what, and where questions instead of yes/no questions

Responding contingently to the child's communication attempts

- Teachers are still refining their skills. Build slowly and give them credit as they progress

Providing Communication Opportunities

◎ What the children are doing differently

- Pragmatically
 - Taking communicative turns
 - Pointing to pictures in the story
 - Vocalizing
 - (Answering questions – didn't get to see this)
- Linguistically
 - Using words on the AAC device
 - (Using speech)
 - (Putting words together using the AAC device)

Providing Communication Opportunities

- Note: Even in the first of each video, we had
 - ✓ Identified motivating contexts for communication
 - ✓ Developed appropriate communication boards
 - ✓ Selected appropriate vocabulary
 - ✓ Organized vocabulary appropriately

Providing Communication Opportunities

- ◎ These steps are necessary but not sufficient for communicative success
 - ◎ Communication partners must change how they interact with AAC clients

- ◎ #1 Reason (I believe) clients fail to use AAC
 - ◎ *THEY ARE NOT PROVIDED WITH MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES*
 - ◎ We must teach communication partners how to do this

Providing Communication Opportunities

◎ This child already is

- Pragmatically
 - Taking communicative turns
 - Pointing to what he wants
 - Using gestures to communicate
 - Answering questions
 - Vocalizing

● However, he is not

- Using words to communicate

Providing Communication Opportunities

- Assumption
 - Maybe we should start with very basic goals
 - Using single symbols to communicate
- However, his receptive language abilities are strong
 - 3 year old range
 - He understands many linguistic structures
 - If his speech were not impaired, he would be using full sentences
 - Don't aim too low!

Providing Communication Opportunities

- Differences between the two videos
 - The major change is that I am using “aided AAC modeling”
 - We must model and model and model and model and model with the AAC device.....
 - Otherwise, why would we expect *them* to use it?
- Move on as quickly as possible...

Providing Communication Opportunities

- Don't hold your clients back
 - Provide them with the communication solutions they need
 - Motivating contexts
 - Appropriate vocabulary
 - Expectation for success
 - Challenge your clients!
 - Expect them to keep improving
 - Increase expectations every time they improve

Summary

- Examine current communication techniques before introducing new ones
- Ensure that all communication techniques are
 - Efficient
 - Effective
 - Socially appropriate
- If the solutions you are trying are not working, carefully examine various reasons why this may be happening
- Address challenging behaviors systematically and consistently