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Professional Certificate in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Assessment for Special Needs Learners

# Introduction to Augmentative and Alternative Communication

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## Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to a set of tools and strategies that support individuals with communication impairments to express themselves. AAC can be used to supplement existing speech or replace it altogether. AAC systems can range from low-tech options like communication boards with pictures and symbols to high-tech devices with speech-generating software.

## Communication Board

A communication board is a low-tech AAC tool that consists of pictures, symbols, or words that individuals can point to in order to communicate. Communication boards are often used by individuals with speech impairments or limited verbal abilities to express their thoughts and needs.

## Speech-Generating Device (SGD)

A speech-generating device (SGD) is a high-tech AAC tool that produces speech output based on user input. SGDs can be programmed with vocabulary and phrases tailored to the individual's needs. SGDs are often used by individuals with severe speech impairments or conditions like ALS or cerebral palsy.

## Symbol

In the context of AAC, a symbol refers to a visual representation of a word, concept, or action. Symbols can be used on communication boards or electronic devices to help individuals with communication impairments express themselves. Symbols can be in the form of pictures, icons, or abstract representations.

## Core Vocabulary

Core vocabulary refers to a set of high-frequency words that are essential for communication in various contexts. In AAC, core vocabulary words are often prioritized in communication systems to enable individuals to express a wide range of messages efficiently. Core vocabulary includes words like "yes," "no," "more," "help," and "want."

## Fringer Spelling System

The Fringer Spelling System is a method of communication for individuals who have limited mobility and use a single switch to type messages letter by letter. The Fringer system uses a scanning technique where the user activates the switch to select the desired letter as it is highlighted on the screen.

## Visual Scene Display (VSD)

A Visual Scene Display (VSD) is an AAC tool that presents communication options in a contextualized visual scene rather than a grid of symbols or words. VSDs can help individuals with communication impairments better understand and express themselves in real-life situations. For example, a VSD may depict a kitchen scene with interactive elements like a stove, fridge, and sink for the user to select.

### Direct Selection

Direct selection is a method of choosing symbols or words on an AAC device by physically pointing to them. Direct selection can be done using a finger, stylus, or other pointing tool. Direct selection is often preferred by individuals with good motor control and accuracy.

### Scanning

Scanning is a method of accessing symbols or words on an AAC device when direct selection is not possible due to motor limitations. In scanning, the user highlights or selects items on the screen as they are presented sequentially or in groups. Scanning can be automatic (with a predetermined timing) or step-by-step (user-initiated).

### Switch Access

Switch access refers to using external switches or buttons to control an AAC device for individuals with limited motor abilities. Switches can be activated by various body parts like hands, feet, or head movements. Switch access enables individuals with physical disabilities to navigate communication systems independently.

### High-Tech AAC

High-tech AAC refers to advanced electronic devices and software used for communication by individuals with speech impairments. High-tech AAC tools include speech-generating devices, tablets with communication apps, and eye-tracking systems. High-tech AAC offers a wide range of customization and functionality to meet individual communication needs.

### Low-Tech AAC

Low-tech AAC refers to simple, non-electronic communication tools used by individuals with communication impairments. Low-tech AAC options include communication boards, picture cards, alphabet charts, and communication books. Low-tech AAC is often cost-effective and easy to customize for specific communication needs.

### Dynamic Display

Dynamic display refers to AAC devices that change the content on the screen based on user input or context. Dynamic display devices allow users to access a larger vocabulary by organizing symbols or words into categories or pages that can be navigated through. Dynamic display systems can be beneficial for individuals with more advanced communication skills.

### Static Display

Static display refers to AAC devices where the communication options remain fixed on the screen without changing. Static display devices typically present a grid of symbols or words that the user can select from. Static display systems are often used by individuals who benefit from consistent access to core vocabulary and familiar layouts.

### Vocabulary Set

A vocabulary set in AAC refers to the collection of words, symbols, or phrases available for communication on a device. Vocabulary sets can be pre-programmed or user-customized to include relevant vocabulary for

the individual's needs. Vocabulary sets can range from basic core vocabulary to specialized terms based on the user's preferences and communication goals.

#### Symbol-Based Communication

Symbol-based communication refers to using visual representations like pictures, icons, or symbols to convey messages and ideas. Symbol-based communication is commonly used in AAC systems to support individuals with limited speech or language abilities. Symbol-based communication can be customized to match the user's understanding and preferences.

#### Text-Based Communication

Text-based communication refers to using written words or letters to communicate messages. Text-based communication can be implemented in AAC systems through spelling or typing interfaces. Text-based communication is beneficial for individuals who can read and write but may have difficulty speaking or forming spoken sentences.

#### Unaided Communication

Unaided communication refers to using only body movements, gestures, facial expressions, or vocalizations to convey messages. Unaided communication does not require any external tools or devices. Unaided communication can be used by individuals with communication impairments who rely on non-verbal cues to express themselves.

#### Aided Communication

Aided communication refers to using external tools or devices to support communication for individuals with speech or language impairments. Aided communication includes AAC systems like communication boards, speech-generating devices, and picture cards. Aided communication enhances the individual's ability to express thoughts, needs, and emotions effectively.

#### Alternative Access

Alternative access in AAC refers to using non-traditional methods to operate communication devices for individuals with physical disabilities. Alternative access methods can include eye gaze, head movement, sip-and-puff switches, or brain-computer interfaces. Alternative access ensures that individuals with motor limitations can still use AAC tools independently.

#### Communication Partner

A communication partner is an individual who interacts with the AAC user and supports their communication efforts. Communication partners can be family members, caregivers, educators, or therapists. Communication partners play a crucial role in facilitating successful communication exchanges, modeling language, and providing encouragement to AAC users.

#### Symbol Rate

Symbol rate in AAC refers to the speed at which symbols or words are presented to the user for selection. Symbol rate can impact the user's ability to communicate efficiently, especially for individuals who rely on scanning or have limited motor skills. Adjusting the symbol rate can improve the user's access to communication options.

### Core Word Strategy

The core word strategy is an approach to AAC that emphasizes the use of core vocabulary words in communication systems. Core words are high-frequency words that are versatile and applicable across various contexts. By focusing on core words, individuals can express a wide range of messages using a limited set of vocabulary.

### Pragmatic Skills

Pragmatic skills in AAC refer to the ability to use language effectively in social interactions and everyday communication. Pragmatic skills include turn-taking, topic maintenance, initiating and responding to conversations, and using appropriate communication strategies. Individuals using AAC systems may require support in developing pragmatic skills to engage meaningfully with others.

### User Interface

The user interface in AAC refers to the design and layout of the communication device or software that the user interacts with. A user-friendly interface is essential for individuals using AAC systems to navigate easily, access communication options, and customize settings. The user interface should be intuitive, responsive, and tailored to the user's needs.

### Symbol Selection

Symbol selection in AAC refers to the process of choosing symbols or words to communicate a message. Symbol selection can be done through direct selection, scanning, or other access methods based on the user's abilities. Efficient symbol selection is crucial for the user to express themselves accurately and efficiently.

### Language Representation

Language representation in AAC refers to how spoken language is translated into visual symbols or text for communication. Language representation can vary based on the user's language skills, cognitive abilities, and communication preferences. Effective language representation ensures that the AAC system aligns with the user's linguistic understanding and communication style.

### Transitioning

Transitioning in AAC refers to the process of moving from one communication method or device to another. Transitioning may involve switching from low-tech to high-tech AAC tools, upgrading software, or adapting communication strategies. Smooth transitioning is essential to ensure continuity in communication access and effectiveness for the user.

### Personalized Vocabulary

Personalized vocabulary in AAC refers to customizing the communication system with words, symbols, and phrases that are relevant and meaningful to the individual user. Personalized vocabulary reflects the user's interests, preferences, daily routines, and communication goals. Tailoring the vocabulary set enhances the user's engagement and communication success.

### Contextualized Communication

Contextualized communication in AAC refers to using symbols or words in specific situations or

environments to enhance understanding and relevance. Contextualized communication adapts the vocabulary and messages to match the context, such as at home, school, or community settings. Contextualized communication supports the user in expressing themselves effectively in diverse situations.

#### Feedback Mechanism

A feedback mechanism in AAC refers to the system's ability to provide responses or cues to the user based on their input. Feedback mechanisms can include auditory cues, visual prompts, confirmation messages, or error alerts to guide the user in using the AAC system effectively. Clear feedback enhances the user's communication experience and learning.

#### AAC Assessment

AAC assessment is the process of evaluating an individual's communication needs, abilities, and preferences to determine the most suitable AAC system. AAC assessment involves gathering information through interviews, observations, trials, and standardized tests to identify the user's communication strengths and challenges. AAC assessment guides the selection and implementation of appropriate communication tools.

#### Environmental Control

Environmental control in AAC refers to using communication devices to operate appliances, electronics, or environmental settings in the user's surroundings. Environmental control features in AAC systems enable individuals with physical disabilities to control lights, doors, TVs, and other devices independently. Environmental control enhances the user's autonomy and accessibility in daily activities.

#### Symbol Storage

Symbol storage in AAC refers to the capacity of the device to store and organize symbols, words, and phrases for communication. Symbol storage can vary based on the device's memory capacity, file management system, and customization options. Sufficient symbol storage is essential for users to access a diverse vocabulary and personalized content.

#### Visual Support

Visual support in AAC refers to using pictures, symbols, or visual cues to enhance communication for individuals with language impairments. Visual support can help individuals understand and express messages more effectively than relying on auditory input alone. Visual support aids in comprehension, memory, and communication clarity for AAC users.

#### Goal Setting

Goal setting in AAC involves establishing communication goals and objectives for the individual using AAC systems. Goal setting can focus on improving language skills, expanding vocabulary, increasing independence, or enhancing social interactions. Setting clear and measurable goals guides the intervention plan and tracks the user's progress in communication development.

#### Modeling

Modeling in AAC refers to demonstrating the use of the communication system to the user through spoken language, pointing, or selecting symbols. Modeling helps the user understand how to navigate the AAC system, select vocabulary, and construct messages. Modeling is an effective strategy for teaching language

and communication skills to AAC users.

#### Language Development

Language development in AAC refers to the process of acquiring and refining communication skills using AAC systems. Language development goals may include improving vocabulary, grammar, syntax, pragmatics, and literacy skills. Language development in AAC is supported through structured interventions, practice opportunities, and functional communication activities.

#### Multimodal Communication

Multimodal communication in AAC refers to combining different modes of communication, such as speech, gestures, symbols, and text, to convey messages. Multimodal communication maximizes the user's communication options and flexibility in expressing thoughts and ideas. Multimodal approaches cater to the user's strengths and preferences in communication.

#### Symbol Organization

Symbol organization in AAC refers to arranging symbols, words, or phrases in a logical and user-friendly manner on the communication device. Symbol organization can include categorizing vocabulary by topics, frequency, or functions to facilitate quick access and efficient communication. Clear symbol organization enhances the user's navigation and communication fluency.

#### Augmentative Communication

Augmentative communication refers to using additional communication tools or strategies to supplement existing speech or language abilities. Augmentative communication can enhance the user's expressive and receptive language skills, support comprehension, and facilitate social interactions. Augmentative communication is beneficial for individuals with communication challenges but still have some verbal skills.

#### Alternative Communication

Alternative communication refers to using non-traditional methods or devices to replace spoken language for individuals with severe communication impairments. Alternative communication systems like AAC provide individuals with alternative means of expressing thoughts, emotions, and needs. Alternative communication ensures that individuals with complex communication needs can communicate effectively.

#### Symbol Recognition

Symbol recognition in AAC refers to the user's ability to identify and understand visual symbols or icons presented on the communication device. Symbol recognition skills are essential for selecting the appropriate symbols to convey messages accurately. Symbol recognition can be supported through consistent exposure, practice, and reinforcement in AAC interventions.

#### Customization Options

Customization options in AAC refer to the flexibility and adaptability of the communication system to meet the user's preferences and needs. Customization options allow users to personalize vocabulary, layouts, settings, and access methods according to their communication style. Customization enhances user engagement, communication efficiency, and overall satisfaction with the AAC system.

### Communication Profile

A communication profile in AAC is a summary of the individual's communication abilities, preferences, and challenges. The communication profile includes information about the user's language skills, vocabulary knowledge, access methods, sensory preferences, and social communication abilities. A comprehensive communication profile guides the selection and implementation of appropriate AAC interventions.

### Symbol Contrast

Symbol contrast in AAC refers to the visual distinction between symbols or words displayed on the communication device. Symbol contrast influences the user's ability to differentiate between communication options and select the desired symbols accurately. High symbol contrast enhances visibility, readability, and usability of the AAC system for individuals with visual impairments.

### Response Time

Response time in AAC refers to the delay between the user's input and the system's output or feedback. Response time can impact the user's communication fluency, engagement, and effectiveness in using the AAC system. Minimizing response time ensures real-time interaction and supports the user's communication flow and participation.

### Language Representation

Language representation in AAC refers to how spoken language is translated into visual symbols or text for communication. Language representation can vary based on the user's language skills, cognitive abilities, and communication preferences. Effective language representation ensures that the AAC system aligns with the user's linguistic understanding and communication style.

### Access Method

An access method in AAC refers to the way the user interacts with the communication device to select symbols or words. Access methods can include direct selection, scanning, eye gaze, head movements, switch control, or touch screen. Selecting the appropriate access method is crucial to match the user's motor abilities and communication needs.

### Symbol Hierarchy

Symbol hierarchy in AAC refers to organizing symbols or vocabulary based on their importance, frequency of use, or complexity. Symbol hierarchy helps users prioritize communication options and access core vocabulary efficiently. Symbol hierarchy can be customized to match the user's language development, communication goals, and preferred topics.

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