

How to be a SUPER communication partner

Strategies and Resources Modeling and AAC Strategies

<http://coreword.assistiveware.com/t/how-to-be-a-super-communication-partner/5514>



Your role as a communication partner is one of the most important “jobs” you will do. What you **DO** counts; what you **THINK** is important; how you **RESPOND** matters; every interaction is an **OPPORTUNITY**.

Top traits of a good communication partner

You presume competence and believe in a person’s ability to learn effective communication
You are flexible; ready to adapt and change
You are persistent and never give up on communication
You are consistent; using communication regularly and reliably
You are engaging and interactive; providing real and motivating reasons to communicate
You are patient; ready to allow time for communication to happen
You make AAC always available
You provide a robust AAC system based on core words
These are true super-powers!

Combine these traits with skills in modeling, prompting and responding and you have the perfect combination for a super communication partner!

Modeling

AAC learners need to see what it looks like to communicate using their AAC systems in real conversations, so talk to them using the AAC! Being a good communication partner means that you

model on this AAC system regularly and reliably. The more you model, the easier it will get and the more natural it will come. And the better the chances are, that the AAC user will learn how to use their AAC system to communicate about things that matter to them.

So what does it look like to be super-powered at modeling? Here are some of our tips for getting great at modeling:

- model regularly and consistently
- model across different contexts and environments
- you do not need to model every single word that you say, instead model the key words in the sentence
- think about modeling one more word than the AAC user is currently using
- your modeled sentence on the AAC system may not always be grammatically correct
- make comments and describe things, rather than only ask questions when you model
- model a wide range of communication functions, eg. not just requesting, but also giving opinions, telling news, and having conversations, etc
- model on the AAC users system, or on low-tech paper-based systems
- don't worry if the learner is not looking while you model, keep modeling anyway
- don't stop modeling. If your AAC user is now using their device, it doesn't mean you stop modeling, it just means you start modeling something different, more words & more language on the AAC system
- one model is never enough - you may need to model the same words in the same situations often
- you may have to learn to model without expecting anything in return, as the AAC user may not always respond or reply
- you don't need to make the AAC user copy the model that you provided
- you use self-talk as you model, talk about what you are doing, what folders you are opening to find the word
- you use a slow pace as you model

Prompting

Naturally we often provide prompts and clues to our AAC users to help them use their AAC system to communicate with us.

Probably one of the most important things you can do as a communication partner, is allow more time, by pausing and waiting. You must remember to give the AAC user longer to respond before you jump in with prompts, or to take over their turn to talk.

When you do provide a prompt, there are a few different prompts you can provide:

- *Verbal* prompts such as "Find your chat words if you want to tell us what you think!"
- *Gestural* prompts such as pointing to their AAC system to remind them to use it
- *Physical* prompts such as hand-over-hand or hop-on prompting, when you take the AAC users hand or have them hop onto yours and help them to point to the word.

Whilst it can seem tempting to grab an AAC users hand to make them say words on their AAC system, this should really be avoided. It has been shown that modeling is more effective than hand-over-hand prompting for learning skills effectively.

The final thing to remember about prompting is that you should try to avoid providing too many prompts and always be thinking of ways to fade these prompts over time. Remember, regardless of how often you provide prompts, or what type of prompts you provide, providing a model (as described above) is still the most important thing you can do.

Response strategies

How you respond to an AAC user's attempts at communication is also really important. This encourages the interaction and natural flow of conversation. And gives more chances to model. It provides more opportunities to build and extend language.

Some key response strategies include:

- *Acknowledge*: you acknowledge all attempts at communication.
- *Attribute meaning*: you attribute meaning to the AAC user's message.
- *Expand*: you expand the AAC user's message. eg. If the AAC user says "more", you could model back "want more" on the AAC system.
- *Recast*: you recast, or restate the AAC user's message, so they can see different ways of conveying messages. eg. If the AAC user says "My turn", you could say "Oh! you are telling me you want a go", while pointing to "YOU" and "GO" on the AAC system.

Start today

Make small but super steps toward being a better communication partner, by thinking about how you model, prompt and respond.

~ *Amanda Hartmann, Assistiveware*