SLT Top Tips for supporting AAC and Multimodal communication

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) describes a range of tools and techniques people can use to support spoken communication. These include unaided communication modes such as eye contact, facial expression, body language, gesture, and signing (e.g. Lámh), and aided communication systems which can be either low-tech (e.g. objects of reference, photo or symbol communication boards and books), or high-tech (e.g. Voice Output Communication Aids/ speech generating devices).

We all communicate using a range of different communication modes (e.g. we might ask someone a question using speech while pointing to something and using facial expression).

Total communication/ Multi-modal communication promotes the use of all modes of communication within the person's skills and abilities to enable them to send and receive messages.

If your child uses AAC here are some **ideas** for how to **support** their communication:

-Encourage them to use **all modes of communication available** to them (e.g. a combination of speech/vocalisations, voice output communication aid, pictures/ objects and signs/gestures).

-Try to **position** yourself at your child's **level and facing them** when you are communicating; this is important for reading non-verbal cues such as facial expression and body language.

-Allow your child **extra time** to communicate with you. Allow time for pauses/silence interaction while they are planning what they want to say and avoid interrupting them if it is taking them extra time to communicate their message.

-**Check and clarify** what your child has said if you have not fully understood (e.g. ask them tell you in another way or show you).

-When possible try to **reduce background noise** and find a quiet place to talk. If you are in a noisy environment, encourage them to persist with their messages and/or tell you in another way if you have not fully heard or understood.

-**Take turns** in the interaction; pause and create opportunities for your child to initiate/ask questions so that they are not always in the role of responder.

-Try to **avoid** asking **more than one question at a time** and give them extra time to respond while they are processing your question/ planning their response.

-Ask **open-ended questions** to give more opportunity for language expression (e.g. rather than asking a yes/no question like 'did you go swimming at the weekend?' try asking 'what did you do at the weekend?')

-If you child is in the early stages of learning to use AAC you might need to use strategies to help support their language development e.g.

-Modelling vocabulary and sentences using their AAC system

-Expanding on their messages by adding on an extra word to what they have said

-Recasting their message in the correct way if they have used the wrong word or grammatical structure

For further advice on using AAC and multi-modal communication speak to your Speech and Language Therapist.

Useful advice and resources are available for families at https://communicationmatters.org.uk/resources/