

## Evaluating the Outcomes of AAC Intervention

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### Introduction

Various factors can impact the child's ability to communicate effectively using their AAC device. The outcome of any AAC intervention is affected by the child's motivation and abilities, family support, professional support, resources, environment, and many other factors. Individualizing the child's communication needs and identifying strengths can help predict positive outcomes of intervention. Consistency and reinforcing effective AAC strategies will help the child expand various aspects of communication such as providing information, requesting, protesting, and responding.

### Remember to Explore the Evidence

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of a parent-training program conducted at an AAC Camp (Bruno and Dribbon, 1998), parents were asked to complete a series of surveys regarding their own ability to operate and manage an AAC device, interaction skills with the device, and their child's performance using the device. Surveys were taken before receiving training, immediately following the week long training and six months post training. Training included teaching parents strategies to help their child communicate effectively and to create an awareness on the need for providing their child consistent access to their device.

Parents stated the AAC systems were a secondary mode of communication, thus would retreat to their child using the device only when their speech and gestures were not understood. It is imperative parents understand the importance of the relationship between the child's ability to use their device and their functional communication when communicating about unknown topics and also with unfamiliar listeners.

After training, parents stated positive gains in their own ability to operate the device, interaction and management skills. Parents also stated positive gains in their perception of their child's performance using their device. By becoming educated in the different communication situations (known context versus unknown context and unfamiliar versus familiar listeners), parents are aware of their child's skills and can address their strengths and weaknesses proactively.

Brady et al, 2013 conducted a study in which nonverbal preschool students learn how to communicate with an AAC device. Researchers measured intrinsic factors to help children learn relationships between symbols (pictures, signs, spoken words) and intentions. This is also known as the Intrinsic Symbolic Factor (ISF). Factors included language comprehension, play, nonverbal cognition, and complexity of communication). The results showed that ISF in combination with parent involvement and AAC instruction were positive indicators of successive outcomes. Parents that provide enriching experiences and increased opportunities for their child to use their AAC device will support language and vocabulary growth. Interventions should include parent's involvement to enhance both school and home based environments to promote

generalization. In conclusion, when targeting various aspects of communication across environments, children using AAC are more inclined to learn targeted goals.

### Key Points

- When parents incorporate the AAC device daily, their child has frequent opportunities to communicate across a range of communicative functions and are more likely to use the device as a means of communication.
- Parents can assist in customizing the device for optimal use in environments such as school and home when provided training.
- Exposing children to AAC during the development of word learning simultaneously with skilled intervention can have positive outcomes for effective communication.
- Parents that provide verbal input to children help promote vocabulary and language growth.

### Resources

Brady, N. C., Thiemann-Bourque, K., Fleming, K., & Matthews, K. (2013). Predicting Language Outcomes for Children Learning Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Child and Environmental Factors. *Journal Of Speech, Language & Hearing Research, 56*(5), 1595-1612. doi:1092-4388(2013/12-0102)

Bruno, J., & Dribbon, M. (1998). Outcomes in AAC: Evaluating the effectiveness of a parent training program. *AAC: Augmentative And Alternative Communication, 14*(2), 59-70. doi:10.1080/07434619812331278216