

OUT AND ABOUT WITH COMMUNICATION:

How to Start a Community Group for AAC Users

Presented By: Linda Gould, MS, CCC-SLP
AAC Consultant

With Credit to:

2003 Deanna Wagner, Kim Daswick, Caroline Musselwhite

Circles of Communication Partners

Sarah Blackstone (Blackstone & Berg, 2003)

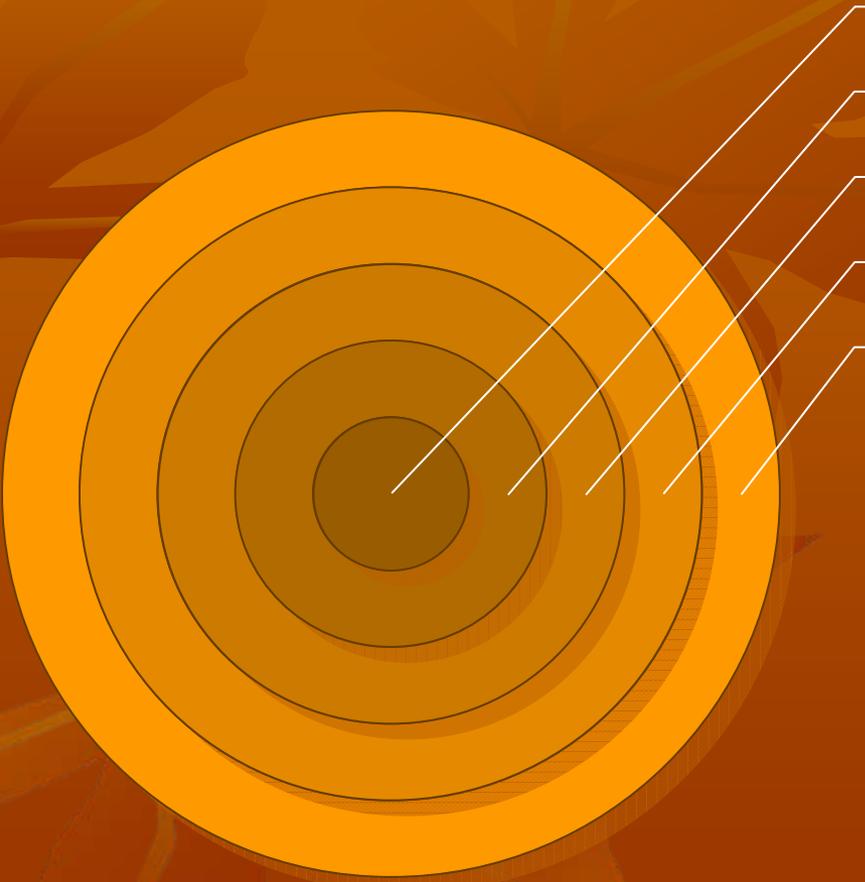
Group 1 - Family, life long partners

Group 2 - Friends and relatives

Group 3 - Acquaintances

Group 4 - Paid workers

Group 5 - Unfamiliar partners



- Of the five circles, communicating with Unfamiliar Partners (Circle 5) seems to be especially challenging . . . and daunting . . . for many AAC users.
 - unfamiliar partners have no shared knowledge to draw on.
 - have no idea about how communication devices/systems function.
 - often do not know the 'rules' of communicating with AAC users (such as speaking directly to the users, pausing, etc.).
 - do not have any strategies to try when communication breakdowns occur.



How do we facilitate successful communication interactions between new/unfamiliar communication partners and AAC users?

An AAC Community Group Can:

1. Support augmented communicators in developing competency in using their various communication strategies, particularly with unfamiliar communication partners (group 5).
 - Linguistic Skills – new vocabulary, icon sequences, navigation, syntax
 - Operational Skills – technical skills required to use and access an AAC system accurately, efficiently, and appropriately.
 - Social Skills – Skills in the social rules of interaction – initiating , maintaining, developing and terminating interactions.
 - Strategic Skills – How an individual can use the strategies and strengths they have to communicate to the best of their ability
2. Provide a network of support to AAC users and their families.
3. Provide unfamiliar communication partners with strategies for communicating more effectively with AAC users and offer them a supportive environment in which they can develop competence as communication partners.

- How does an AAC Community Group work ?
 - AAC Users are invited to join the group. Each individual is required to bring an adult family member or mentor. The mentor is often a respite worker, paid staff or home provider. Friends often attend the group, adding richness and supporting follow-through in other contexts. A small donation is typically requested to defray costs (printing, postage, supplies, etc..)
 - Members of the group plan and participate in various activities and outings. However, it is NOT about the outing. The focus of the group is to facilitate and nurture communication interactions between AAC users and communication partners. It is very easy to allow focus to be on the event only, and ignore communication interaction.

Getting Started....

- It is easiest to begin with a small homogeneous group of AAC Users. (Similar ages, communication systems, and interests.)
- Individuals that attend the group are required to bring an adult family member /home provider or mentor – try to begin with AAC users who have a strong network of family and friends.
- Identify a location where the group can meet. Look for an accessible facility, even if the members of your initial group are ambulatory.
- Plan for the first meeting by sending out a communication questionnaire that AAC users can fill out and bring with them. This will be an important tool for both the AAC user and communication partners.
- Identify a facilitator to lead the group and keep the focus on communication. An SLP with expertise in AAC would be the best person to facilitate the group, at least initially.

Logistics

- Duration— dependent on the activity. Can vary from a hour or two to a day, or even a weekend (overnight) activity (additional cost).
- Frequency – to be agreed on by the group. Typically monthly, although it could be more often.
- Each meeting would begin with a greeting and share from all participants.
- Communication partners would have opportunities at each meeting to partner up with a new AAC user and become familiar with their communication style and strategies.
- After completion of the planned activity – there would be planning time to discuss and plan the next activity.
- Location could remain the same or change.
- New members could be added if there is room and the group agrees.

Tools for Scaffolding Success

- Cheat sheets for vocabulary development
- Communication dictionaries/descriptions of AAC system/strategies for each AAC User
- Visual Supports and Props (photos, closed choice sets, social scripts)
- Activity plan for each meeting which are sent to members in advance.
- Provide communication partners with opportunities to communicate with each of the AAC users in the group.

Ideas for Activities

■ Scavenger Hunt

- Focus on adjectives – find something red, round, square, tiny, large, flat, long, etc..
- Encourage cooperation and social interaction

■ Mad Libs Party

- Work on identifying parts of speech (can have closed sets of words – nouns, verbs, etc. that users can choose from)
- Opportunities for learning and exploring new vocabulary.

■ Putting on a Play

- Practicing social scripts
- Turn-taking

■ Dinner and a Movie

- Pot luck dinner – each member of the group would describe the dish they brought.
- Opportunities for commenting on food and the movie
- Have each member be a movie critic – rating the film.

More ideas...

- Learn about something new
- Community Quest
- Scrapbooking
- Planning a holiday party (Valentine's Day, Halloween).
- Music Jam
- Planting seeds and bulbs.

Think about adding community participants – girl scout or boy scout troop, senior group, drama club, local artist, storyteller.... The AAC group could even think about spearheading a fundraiser for a local organization.

Outcomes

- AAC users increase their competency in the four skill areas (operational, social, strategic, linguistic).
- The makeup of the communication circle shifts – group 5 moves to group 2, new members move to group 5. New communication partners become mentors. The total number of communication partners increases for each AAC user.

Examples

- Activity Plan template
- Communication dictionary
- Communication questionnaire
- Voting, brainstorming, other opportunities for interaction