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Augmentative and Alternative Communication for Autistic Students: Where to Start with Assessment and Intervention Strategies On Demand Course

Presenter: David Hajjar, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

COURSE OVERVIEW

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) includes a wide range of tools and techniques to support non-speaking or minimally verbal autistic students. AAC provides students with a consistent method for expressive communication and a path to building language and literacy skills. AAC systems are considered aided (e.g., tablets, devices) or unaided (e.g., gestures, expressions). The selection and identification of AAC systems is an ongoing and dynamic collaborative process that involves both formal and informal assessments. Once a system has been determined, it is important for the team to focus on developing an individualized plan for use across different settings and with various communication partners. Intervention plans are most successful when caregivers and professionals work together to share ideas, resources, modifications, and feedback. This course will provide a basic overview of how professionals can support autistic students in early elementary to secondary school along their AAC journey. Key areas of AAC assessment will be shared along with specific resources to assist professionals to track progress and gather data to make informed decisions to support AAC users on their journey to achieve communicative competence. AAC systems and strategies will also be discussed in the context of developing a comprehensive intervention plan that is based on the use of partner training and visual supports to expand communication, increase independence, encourage social interaction, and ensure a focus on language and literacy.

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

- Compare and contrast 3 tools that may be used as part of a dynamic and ongoing AAC assessment.
- Discuss 3 methods with associated examples of how language may be represented on an AAC system.
- Discuss 3 evidence based strategies used to increase communication for students with autism who use AAC.
- Explain 3 ways that communication partners can provide support to autistic students who use AAC across classroom, community and home environments.

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TIMED AGENDA

Characteristics of Autistic Learners who use AAC (5 minutes)

AAC Concepts for Autistic Learners (8 minutes)

- Visual & Environmental Supports & Modifications, Multimodal Communication, Training Communication Partners, Achieving Communicative Competence (linguistic, social, operational and strategic), Literacy

Considerations for Assessment Tools and Process (Active, Ongoing & Collaborative) (15 minutes)

- Participation Model: 4 key areas for assessment, Emerging Communicators (Communication Matrix), Context-dependent Communicators (AAC Profile), Independent Communicators (Social Networks, Functional Communication Profile (FCP-R))

AAC systems: Hardware & Interface Design 10 minutes)

- Tools, Displays (grid, visual scene displays(VSDs) & hybrid), Message Representation (single message representation, semantic compaction, alphabet boards), Vocabulary (Core & Fringe)

Strategies to Teach AAC & Support Communication & Independence (18 minutes)

- Specific techniques - Prompting, Modeling, Aided Language Stimulation, Expectant Delay, Video modeling
- Training Partners - Responding to communicative intent, accepting multimodal methods, AAC awareness and practice
- Environmental Modifications - Access to visual supports, Preparation & planning, Considerations across all settings

Summary & Wrap-up (4 minutes)

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

Special Education teachers, Speech-Language Therapists, OTs, counselors, general education teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, PTs, principals, nurses, parents, and anyone who works with someone on the autism spectrum who is using or may benefit from using AAC. This is an introductory level course.



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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFERED

- 1. CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDANCE** - This course is offered for 1.0 clock hours. Full attendance and a passing score of 80% on the test is required.
- 2. ASHA** - This course is offered for .1 ASHA CEUs. Full attendance a passing score of 80% on the course exam and a completed evaluation are required for satisfactory completion of ASHA CEUs. Provider approval and use of the Brand Block does not imply endorsement of course content, specific products, or clinical procedures.
- 3. AOTA** - AEP Connections, LLC is an AOTA Approved Provider of professional development. Course approval ID 009306. This distance learning – independent is offered for up to .1 CEUs (1.0 contact hours). Introductory, OT Service Delivery. AOTA does not endorse specific course content, products, or clinical procedures. A course evaluation and an 80% on the post test is required for satisfactory completion.
- 4. NASP** - AEP Connections is approved by the National Association of School Psychologists to offer continuing education for school psychologists. AEP Connections maintains responsibility for the program. NASP Approved Provider #1165. Full attendance is required and a passing score of 80% is required on the post test. This course is offered for 1.0 credits/hours.
- 5. NBCC** - AEP Connections, LLC has been approved by NBCC as an Approved Continuing Education Provider, ACEP No. 7173. Programs that do not qualify for NBCC credit are clearly identified. AEP Connections is solely responsible for all aspects of the programs.
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- 6. ASWB** - AEP Connections, LLC, #1332, is approved as an ACE provider to offer social work continuing education by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program. Regulatory boards are the final authority on courses accepted for continuing education credit. ACE provider approval period: 1/27/2025- 1/27/2028. Social workers completing this course receive 1 continuing education credit. Full attendance, a course evaluation and an additional post test is required for satisfactory completion.



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DAVID HAJJAR, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

David J. Hajjar is an Associate Professor in the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Department at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York. He has held a Certificate of Clinical Competence from the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) since 1999 and has worked as an SLP across a range of educational, residential, and medical settings in New England, Ohio, New York, and Grenada, West Indies. Dr. Hajjar earned his Ph.D. in Speech and Hearing Sciences from Ohio University and teaches graduate level courses in AAC, Autism, Aphasia, and Research Methods. His research focuses on supporting people who use AAC and their partners across educational, healthcare, and community settings. Dr. Hajjar has a special interest in supporting AAC users and their families to access, participate, and share their experiences from community based recreational participation.

Disclosures: David Hajjar, Ph.D., CCC-SLP receives an annual salary for his job at Ithaca College as an Associate Professor. He is also receiving payment from AEP Connections for the development and implementation of this online course. There are no non-financial disclosures to report.