Tips for Teaching Self-Advocacy on an AAC Device

AAC is a powerful tool that helps learners express their wants and needs, but communication should go beyond simple requests. Self-advocacy is an essential part of communication, empowering users to take an active role in decision-making.

1. **Add Self-Advocacy Vocabulary**

Program words and phrases that will allow the user to advocate for their needs. Add vocabulary for protesting, expressing personal or sensory needs, and informing others about their accommodations.

Based on the language level and processing style of your user, you can program simple self-advocacy words like "yes" and "no" or more detailed phrases like "I need my headphones," "I don't want to," or "I use my device to communicate."

2. **Model Self-Advocacy Vocabulary**

Model how to self-advocate in low-pressure, learning environments so that your user can begin to feel comfortable. Practice using protesting words like "no" or "I don't like it" during activities, such as games or puzzles. Use role-playing as a tool to practice self-advocacy in more challenging scenarios (e.g., talking to a peer).

3. **Acknowledge Preferences and Requests**

Always acknowledge and reinforce your AAC user's communication attempts, especially as they are learning to self-advocate. Create a safe, trusting environment where the user is allowed to say "no," and their choices and requests are respected.

4. **Develop Goals Together**

If possible, allow your user to be involved in the goal making process. Discuss what skills matter to them and find out where and how they may want to practice these self-advocacy skills. Allowing your user to be involved in the decision-making process, even by asking "yes or no," is an important first step in empowering them to feel that their voice is heard and valued.

Supporting AAC users with self-advocacy tools enhances their ability to express themselves effectively and meet their communication needs. Research shows that access to high-tech AAC helps people communicate their thoughts, feelings, and needs more successfully, reducing frustration and maladaptive behaviors, as well as supporting overall wellbeing, happiness, and connection.

Citations:

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