

1. What advice would you give to parents, caregivers, and educators in terms of understanding and respecting the communication preferences of autistic individuals who use AAC?

Lance: First, don't make assumptions. Understand that a communication method that works well in one context might not be effective in another. This is why multimodal communication is important. Over time we understand which methods to default to in different situations. Other people should just trust our judgment. I don't enjoy having to defend my communication preferences to other people. It's okay if they ask out of curiosity, but I will not be subjected to a hostile interrogation.

DJ: Use alternative forms of communication and let the person decide for themselves which to use and when. Learn them alongside your child/student, so you can understand what they're saying in any mode and model using them yourself so you understand the work involved in learning to use them.

2. I have a child who barely uses words, I wanted to know how can AAC help her to communicate better.

Lance: AAC will give her a way to communicate which is motorically easier. It will reduce frustration and negative behaviors.

DJ: It will give her a consistent model of what to practice saying with her voice, too. Many of my friends have started saying more with their vocal chords over time. Offering your child AAC and other alternative modes will tell your child, "I know you have thoughts to convey and things to say and I want to hear them." And will offer your child a way to meaningfully and actively contribute in life and inclusive settings.

Rocky: I would like to add that it is not something that will instantly allow your child to communicate it is something that needs to be modeled by everyone around them but after they figure out what is their preferred communication system they will have the ability to self advocate for themselves. I personally think that is the most important aspect. They will be able to tell people when they need a break and if something is bothering them. Especially when it comes to their health. Having a way to express when they are in pain and what is hurting them.

3. What AAC provider would you recommend to use at the Library to help us communicate with those individuals who are non-verbal?

DJ: I'm not quite sure what you're asking. Are you asking what kind of device would you make available at the library if a nonspeaking person comes into the library? I'm sure you could have an iPad with Proloquo2Go on it. That's probably the most common and least expensive assistive technology to offer someone. ALSO, if someone uses words, they're not nonverbal. Consider using "speaking" and "nonspeaking." The term "nonverbal" is used to really confine what's offered and made possible for a person, which is unacceptable and inaccurate.

If I misunderstood the question, feel free to ask it again at [dj.savarese@gmail.com](mailto:dj.savarese@gmail.com).

4. What strategies have you found successful to navigate the difference in both processing and communication time between verbal and non-verbal individuals, especially for those who have ADHD/are less patient with differences?

Lance: I have found that having my device set so that it speaks each individual word as I type really helps to keep people engaged, and it also minimizes disruptions. I also generally try to make my messages concise. However, there is only so much that AAC users can do to make conversations smooth. Reciprocity is necessary. The conversation partner needs to meet us halfway. Unfortunately, some people are not able or willing to learn and adjust, and that has to be accepted. I will not waste any time or energy on someone who is clearly not able or willing to meet me halfway.

DJ: Again, I'm not sure I understand the question. Are you asking what to do if someone using AAC is talking with someone who has ADHD and finds waiting or slower modes of communication difficult to focus on? If so, consider having both the AAC user and the person with ADHD using devices or comparable modes of communication. I write and type back and forth with some of my closest friends. We enjoy it a lot and it levels the playing field. It also cuts down on an imbalance in how much each of us says. It takes speakers longer to write and type than to speak. ALSO, if someone uses words, they're not nonverbal. Consider using "speaking" and "nonspeaking." The term "nonverbal" is used to really confine what's offered and made possible for a person, which is unacceptable and inaccurate.

Rocky: using the same mode of communication with them is in my opinion the best way. It allows for both people to communicate with more similar processing time and also allows for the non AAC user to get an understanding of what it is like to communicate using AAC.

5. Is there a certain keyboard involved with AAC? I usually use the "QWERTY" keyboard at 51 wpm, but I am unsure if there was a certain keyboard that anyone else would use.

DJ: It depends on the person's preference. Some keyboards are icon-based, some are ABC keyboards and some are QWERTY.

Rocky: there are many different styles of keyboards but I personally use a bluetooth keyboard that I connect to my iPad when I know I am going to need to speak a lot or need to speed up my communication.

Lance: I use an icon based communication system. There are many different types of AAC systems. Some involve spelling, and others don't.

6. I've seen on social media platforms some debate on facilitated communication being problematic. I am unfamiliar with facilitated communication, can you speak on the pros and cons of facilitated communication?