

## **Advocating and Addressing Communication: The other form of AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication)**

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### **Session Description:**

Learners with complex communication needs (CCN) are often not able to rely on solely verbal communication to meet their needs (Beukelman & Light, 2020). In these cases, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) modalities may be used including both aided and unaided systems. Access to AAC allows for expressive language development despite limited intelligible speech (Smith & Barton-Hulsey, 2016). Despite this evidence and the ongoing development of technology, myths circulate at both the professional (e.g. speech-language pathologist, educators, etc.) and consumer level (e.g. parents, families, friends) that prevent access to AAC. These myths encompass ideas such as AAC will negatively impact speech development, it will create issues in social settings with peers, and children are too young or lack the prerequisite skills to successfully use AAC (Jensen et al, 2023; Smith & Barton-Hulsey, 2016). These are supplemented by additional barriers such as low expectations of the learner with CCN, the preference for vocal speech, and finding the learning process draining (Donato et al., 2018; Moorcroft et al., 2019). This presentation serves to alleviate the effects of these myths and barriers by capitalizing on facilitators present (e.g. motivation to learn) and identifying explicit recommendations on how to apply evidence-based practice to AAC intervention (Donato et al., 2018; Jensen et al, 2023); Moorcroft et al., 2019). Applying this knowledge will support parents and professionals alike in advocating for complex communicators and fighting back against continuously spreading misinformation.

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Evaluate statements about AAC (augmentative and alterative communication) as fact or myth.
2. Appraise and recommend best practices for AAC
3. Apply knowledge of AAC to advocate for learners with complex communication needs

**Jaime Branaman, M.A. CCC-SLP** (She/They) is a licensed speech-language pathologist in Maryland and New Mexico. She is currently a PhD student and clinical instructor in speech and hearing sciences at the University of New Mexico where she is studying autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) under Dr. Cindy Gevarter. Prior to beginning her PhD, Jaime worked clinically for 7+ years with learners ages 1 through 21 across the communication needs spectrum. Her clinical experience working in interprofessional teams in schools, private practice, and early intervention programs helped to shape her research interests along with encouraging her to pursue her certification in behavior analysis. She is currently working to complete her graduate certificate in applied behavior analysis

and working as a behavior technician within the community. Her research interests are focused in AAC assessment for autistic learners, clinical education, and interprofessional collaboration.

**Dr. Kimberly Mattison** (She/her/hers) is assistant clinic director at the University of New Mexico's speech clinic. She works as a clinical instructor and supports the growth of graduate students in the field. a new member of UNM's Speech-Language Pathology Faculty. She has worked as a Speech-Language Pathologist in a variety of clinical environments where her passion has always been working with individuals with complex communication needs. She has a particular love for working with children who utilize AAC devices in all therapeutic environments. Through working in schools, specialized schools, outpatient facilities, private practices, and even early intervention, her favorite aspect of therapy is always building foundational language skills.

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