

Encouraging the Use of Non-verbal Communication Methods

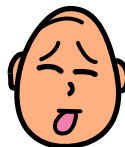
“You couldn’t say a word if you were sitting on your hands.” Have you ever heard that expression? Usually, it refers to someone who uses their hands a lot when they talk. When we talk to each other, we do not only use our speech. We add to our speech with non-verbal communication methods including:

- Body language (e.g., tensing to indicate frustration, sagging shoulders to indicate disappointment)
- Pointing to indicate specific objects , people or places in the environment or provide directions
- Gestures (e.g., patting one’s stomach to show hunger, touching one’s head to indicate a headache)
- Facial expressions (e.g., frowning to indicate sadness, smiling to indicate pleasure)

We can say so much with non-verbal communication.



Happy!



Not good!



I don’t know

Non-verbal communication methods help to keep the attention of communication partners, clarify messages and show the intensity of a statement. Even though they are very important, AAC users may not use non-verbal communication methods very often to supplement their communication. This may be because of physical disabilities or concentration on using their augmentative communication system.

AAC users should be encouraged to use whatever non-verbal communication methods as they can. Sometimes, goals and instruction is needed. Other times, just a reminder. It can take practice.

Use of non-verbal communication is especially important for AAC users using synthesized voice output (computerized voice) on a communication device. Synthesized speech does not have the natural intonation of a human voice. Without intonation, it is difficult to communicate intensity of feeling or tone (e.g., sarcastic, humor, anger). Non-verbal communication can provide this additional information by adding appropriate facial expression or body language.

At a ceremony, an AAC user gave a speech. During this speech, he referred to his method of saying “yes” and “no” with a gesture of “thumb up” and “thumb down.” In his next sentence, he said that his wrist got so tired in conversations so he decided to pursue augmentative communication! The whole crowd laughed. That joke regarding his wrist would not have been funny without the gesture.

Courtesy of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. Revised June 2014, DynaVox.

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