

Understanding and using the words/symbols and vocabulary of their communication system. This area of competency is related to how well an AAC user can express themselves and understand others. It is more than just knowing the words/symbols; it's about being able to use them to communicate.

KEY ASPECTS OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Vocabulary Knowledge

- Receptive language: understanding language and understanding the different words on their communication system
- Expressive language: Using words on their communication system to communicate and express themselves

Syntax and Grammar – arranging words to follow the rules of the language

Morphology – changing parts of the word to change their meaning

Semantic Understanding – understanding the meaning of words and how they related to one another in sentences

Symbol Knowledge – AAC systems use symbols, pictures, or icons instead of (or alongside) written words. Some symbols are concrete and are easily recognizable, but others may be abstract and not as recognizable

Cultural and Social Language Use – Language use can vary depending on the cultural or social contexts. It also includes informal versus formal language.

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Modeling – use the communication system yourself when talking with the AAC user

Reading – use the communication system to read together and talk about the story

Daily Routines – use the communication system to label items and actions

Play – use the communication system during fun activities

The **key thing to remember** is to use it the communication system every day so the AAC user can learn their system and develop their language skills.

The skills an AAC user needs to use and maintain their communication system.

KEY ASPECTS OF OPERATIONAL COMPETENCE

Basic Device Use – turning on/off a high-tech device, charging a device, and adjusting settings such as volume and brightness.

Navigation Skills – many communication applications require have many different pages and folders that an AAC user will need to learn how to navigate.

Access Method – knowing how to access their communication system based on their physical abilities. This can include touching the screen, activating a switch, using eye gaze, or other input methods.

Maintenance – updating the communication application and device software, troubleshooting problems, backing up the system, and cleaning the device.

Communication Application Use – knowing how to add words, change/modify buttons, add/modify pages, and changing the appearance of symbols. These customizations help improve use of the system for the AAC user.

Emergency Procedures – knowing who to contact for technical support and having a back-up communication system if their system needs to go out for repair or is not working.

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP OPERATIONAL COMPETENCE

Daily Routines – create daily routines where they learn to charge their device, to wear it when transitioning, and cleaning when dirty

Guided Exploration – Explore the device together to learn how to navigate the system, discover different functions, and explore different categories

Daily Routines – use the communication system to label items and actions

The **key thing to remember** is to teach the skills necessary to use and maintain their communication system. This will help develop responsibility and give them a sense of ownership of their system.

The skills and abilities that an AAC user needs to effectively participate in social interactions. It includes the rules of conversation and how to develop and maintain social relationships.

KEY ASPECTS OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Initiating and Maintaining Conversations – knowing how to start a conversation, greet others, ask/answer questions, make comments, and stay on topic. AAC systems might have specific phrases to help with conversations, such as the AAC users name and prestored questions to ask.

Understanding Social Cues – understanding nonverbal cues such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions.

Expressing Emotions – being able to share how we feel, such as happy, sad, or frustrated. It is also important to be able to read other people's emotions and respond appropriately.

Communicating in Different Social Contexts – knowing when to use formal language and informal language, such as talking with a teacher or boss versus talking with friends and family.

Repairing Communication Breakdowns – recognizing when a message hasn't been understood and taking steps to clarify or rephrase a message.

Building Relationships – using their communication system to develop and maintain friendships

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Games – play games to learn turn taking and how to interact with others

Video Modeling – use videos to learn how to engage in positive social interactions

Peer Interactions – real life interactions with peers will provide opportunities to learn, practice, and problem solve social skills

The **key thing to remember** is to participate in activities that encourage interacting with other people to learn and practice these skills.

The skills and abilities that an AAC user needs to overcome limitations of their communication system and overcome communication challenges.

KEY ASPECTS OF STRATEGIC COMPETENCE

Repairing Communication Breakdowns – recognizing when a message hasn't been heard or was not understood. Learning when to repeat a message versus taking steps to clarify the message by rephrasing.

Using Different Modalities of Communication – knowing how to switch to other modalities of communication if their communication system is not available, such as using gestures, facial expressions, sign language, or writing.

Overcoming Device Limitations – developing ways to work around limitations of the communication system, such as when a word is not on the device. This can involve finding other way to say the words, either using synonyms or by describing.

Timing and Pacing – have preprogrammed message or using text prediction to increase to speed up communication, especially in fast paced conversations

Self Advocacy – having preprogrammed phrases in the device to let a communication partner know about their communication skills and needs. For example, having a preprogrammed message that says: "I understand what you are saying. I use this device to communicate. Please give me time to write my message."

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP STRATEGIC COMPETENCE

Practice repairing communication breakdowns – using scenarios or role playing

Synonym Description Game – learn how to describe words

Practice Different Modalities of Communication – practice different ways to communicate that don't involve the communication system

Text Prediction – develop literacy skills and learn how to use text prediction to speed up communication

The **key thing to remember** is that developing these skills will help the AAC user develop independency, self advocacy, and engage in effective communication.

*This resource was created in collaboration with the
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