**HOW-TO: Actively Teaching Vocabulary Using Themes**

Core words are the common and flexible words that are useful in every situation. FRINGE VOCABULARY is the rest: the specialized words that make our language detailed and interesting. Children learn new vocabulary naturally through their daily exposure to experiences. Children who use AAC often have less exposure to experiences for a variety of reasons—they may not be able to access the same places or materials, they may be otherwise occupied by the extra time and energy it takes for them to communicate, or they may have specific interests that limit their exposure to new things. This creates a need for active vocabulary teaching.

**What is Themed Vocabulary Teaching**

Vocabulary themes give structure to our teaching and can help us to think of and create activities to explore new words. Sometimes it works best if both the child and the adults know what the theme of the vocabulary is, and sometimes is can work better for the adult to use the theme as a guide for themselves. Either way is fine; do what works better for the child.

Themes can be chosen many ways: by season, interest, upcoming activities, family values, categories on the talker, functional daily life skills, class units, etc. Once a theme is chosen and specific words are listed, activities can be developed. Words should include nouns, verbs and related describing words.

**How to Actively Teach Vocabulary**

Once you have your first theme, list words that may interest the child and/or be relevant to the experience, and find those on the talker. Choose a few key words to start modeling during the first activity, and practice navigating to those words until the motor plan (series of buttons) feels comfortable to you. When you do the activity together, talk as you normally would but also model the chosen key words whenever you can. This emphasizes the words and also demonstrates to your child how to say the words using the talker. Here are two examples.

Theme: containers. Key words: backpack, ziplock, garbage can. Motor plan in Touch Chat with Word Power 60: Groups > Containers. First activity: clean out the backpack after a week of school, wash the baggies, dispose of garbage.

Theme: furniture. Key words: couch, rug, window. Motor plan: Groups > Furniture. First activity: drive cars around the living room over the rug, under the rug, up the couch, across the couch to the window, across the window.