Inclusive Education

Communicating Independantly and with Autonomy while using AAC

What Is Language?
Language is the system we use to communicate. It encompasses:
- Words and vocabulary
- Grammar and sentence structure
- Receptive skills (understanding language)
- Expressive skills (using language to communicate)
- Social interaction skills (navigating conversations and relationships)

Language is more than just speaking; it is how we connect, share, and interact with the people around us.

The Many Functions of Language
Language serves a wide range of purposes in our daily lives. These functions are often overlooked when teaching or supporting communication development. Some key functions include:

- Requesting
- Asking for and sharing information
- Greeting and farewelling
- Protesting and disagreeing
- Agreeing and confirming
- Advocating and self-representing
- Telling stories and joking
- Consoling and encouraging
- Explaining and describing
- Gaining attention and complimenting
- Apologizing and teasing
- Remembering and reflecting

Supporting Language Development
When supporting a child's language growth, especially when they use a communication device (talker), we must intentionally model and encourage a variety of language functions.

Why It Matters
Focusing on diverse language functions helps build a robust and powerful communication system. It enables children to:
- Go beyond basic requests
- Express autonomy and independence
- Engage meaningfully in learning and social interaction
- Experience fulfillment and joy through communication

Practical Strategies for Fostering Language Functions

To support a child's full communicative potential:

- **Encourage self-expression**: Advocate for messages of opinion and identity.
- **Validate protesting and negation**: Acknowledge messages even if they can't be honored immediately.
- **Be a communication ally**: Help the child share their thoughts with others.
- **Model advocacy**: Use the talker to express your own simple opinions and preferences.
- **Practice in low-stakes settings**: Share opinions during routines to build confidence.