

TRANSCRIPT: AAC focus group

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The aim of the session today was to encourage the AAC users to actually build sentences. They're quite happy to use their talkers for key words, which is great, but what we want them to do is to be more specific with their communication by using different concepts such as size, colour or shape so that they can really get what they want. Often children are given things without making a choice and, at this school, we want our students to have a voice. It's really important to us that the child's choices and preferences are continually addressed.

AAC can be quite powerful and the vocabulary sets that the students were using are quite fast and they can make quite complex sentences, if the students are motivated to do so.

Often AAC users are reluctant to use their communication aid because it's different to everybody else and, frequently, we find that they will try to use all other methods before using their communication aid. They will try to use speech. They will use signing and gesture, and the AAC really supports all of that, but where it comes into its own is when they're trying to communicate to a complete stranger who's not familiar with their particular ways of communicating. The idea is that, even when they leave this school, they will continue to use these devices into adulthood.

Technology is moving very rapidly and the communication aids that they were using today, they're quite cumbersome and they don't look very trendy. But we have one student in school at the moment who's trialling a communication package on his iPod, so that means he can have a very discreet device in his pocket to communicate with other people and that's proving to be much more successful because it looks so much cooler, and this may well be the way that that we go in the future.

If a student strays away from the topic of conversation, I don't mind at all because the whole point is getting them to use their communication aid effectively. So, if they can use that to be mean or take the Mickey then that's fine by me.