Supporting individuals with complex communication difficulties

Emily Higgins-Walsh

Introduction

About me: Emily Higgins-Walsh

- Started career at the Seashell Trust in South Manchester.

- Worked primarily with autistic children and adults who also had a learning disability and who used no or few spoken words.

- Therefore worked very closely with two brilliant Assistive Technologists; to explore alternative ways to empower these autistic young people to express themselves with independence.

- Moved to ATtherapy in 2018 – an independent SLT company specialising in AAC

- Since 2021, I have worked in the NHS bringing flexible and individual AAC approaches to autistic children on the NHS caseload.

Acronyms

LD – Learning Disability

PECS – Picture Exchange Communication System

LAMP – Language Acquisition through Motor Planning

SLT – Speech and Language Therapy / Therapist

AAC – Augmentative and Alternative Communication

ABA – Applied Behavioural Analysis

ALS – Aided Language Stimulation

Session content

- What is AAC?

- Using a Total communication approach

- Why flexibility and visuals are important

- Different types of commonly-used clinical interventions (with discussion of the evidence-base behind these)

- How can we use AAC to overcome complex communication challenges?

What is AAC?

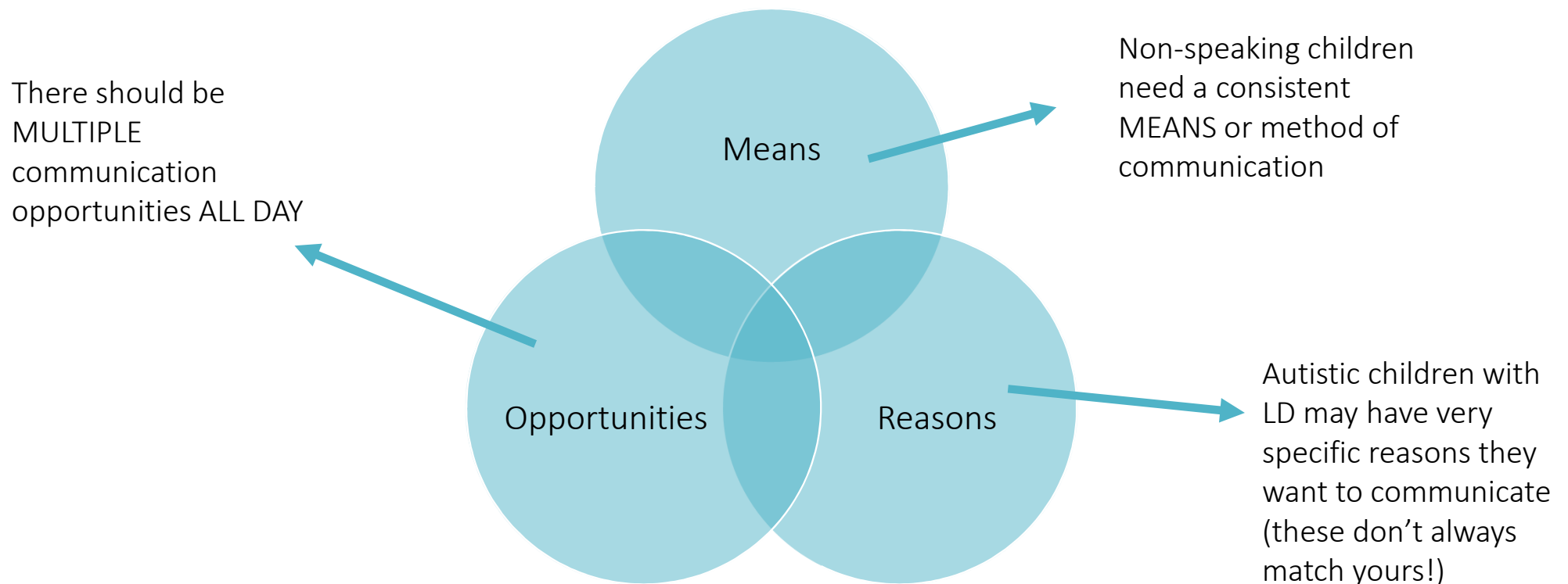AAC stands for Augmentative and Alternative Communication.

It means ANY communication method which is *alternative to speech* and which *augments our ability to communicate effectively*.

Who uses AAC?

How to deliver person-centred care to non-speaking individuals?

NHS
Lancashire & South Cumbria
NHS Foundation Trust

Non-speaking children need a consistent MEANS or method of communication

There should be MULTIPLE communication opportunities ALL DAY

Means

Opportunities

Reasons

Autistic children with LD may have very specific reasons they want to communicate (these don't always match yours!)

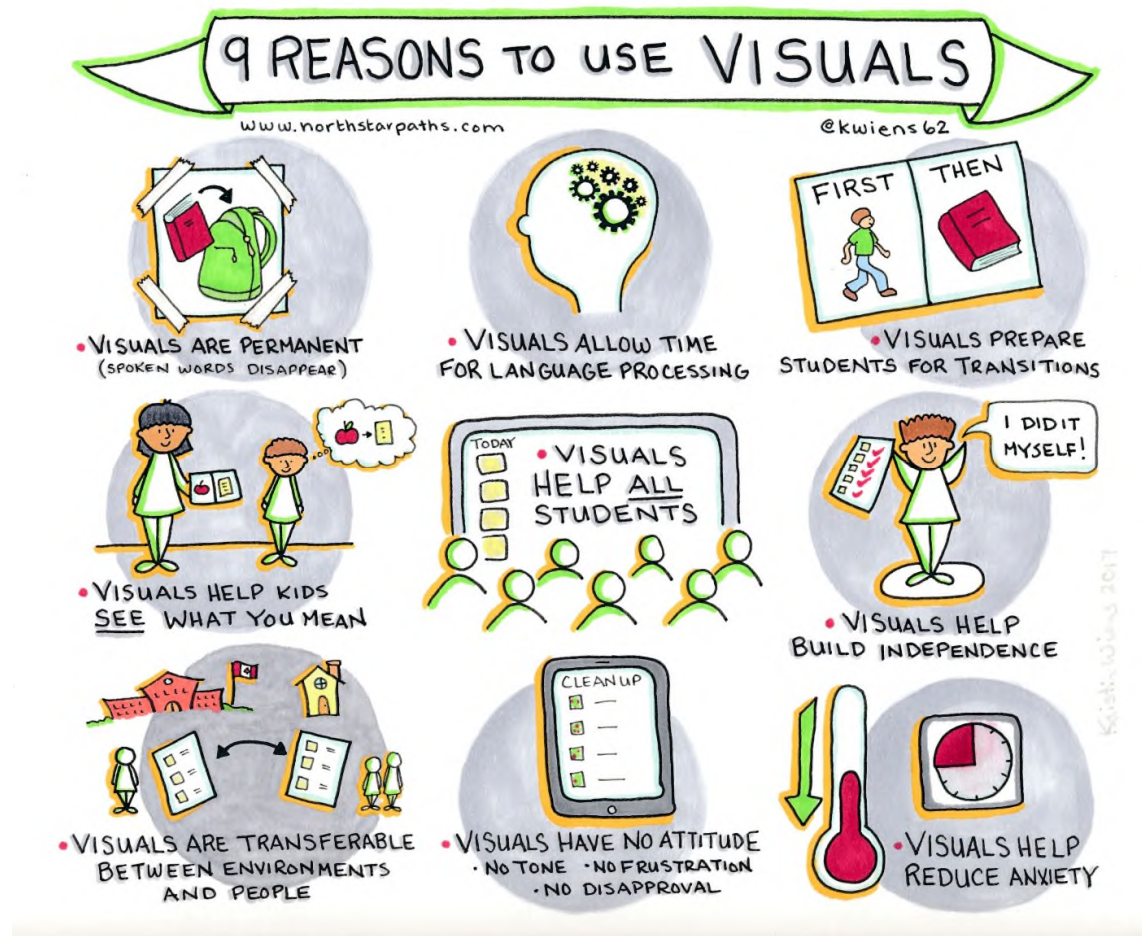# What is Total Communication?

A Total Communication approach is about finding and using the BEST combination of communication methods for each individual person.

➢ Speech?

➢Sign?

➢ Sign plus speech?

➢ Visual communication book?

➢ Electronic communication device?

➢Combination of speech, communication book and electronic device?

➢Writing?

So WHY are visuals so important?!

Different ways of using visuals

Examples of visuals for <u>understanding</u>	Examples of visuals for <u>expression</u>
Now/next board	PECS book
Social stories and comic strip conversations	Single symbols
Visual timeline / schedule	Communication book
Traffic light system	Core boards
Quick visuals on a fob	Electronic communication device
Zones of regulation	Zones of regulation
Sign	Sign

PECS

❑ Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

❑ Developed in the US in 1985 by Bondy and Frost

❑ Described as a form of AAC which has been 'implemented worldwide with thousands of learners of all ages who have various cognitive, physical and communication challenges'

❑ 6 phases to work through. Based on compliance and reward.

❑ Has been a traditional part of SLT intervention for many years, particularly when working with autistic pre-schoolers

❑ Becoming more debated within SLT circles in the UK due to it's foundations being embedded in ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis)

www.pecs-unitedkingdom.com/pecs/

Core boards / theme boards

❑ Core boards are typically used alongside an Aided Language Stimulation approach.

❑ Used to support young people at an early stage of communication development.

❑ Works by exposing core and fringe vocabulary side-by-side to model language in a low-demand, positive way

❑ Possible to model a range of communicative functions

❑ These form the basis of more complex communication books

LAMP

- ❑ Language Acquisition through Motor Planning (LAMP)
- ❑ It's a therapeutic approach based on neurological and motor principles
- ❑ Works by targeting a specific rule (or motor plan) to express a word; which mimics the neural pathways used for typical speech production
- ❑ Arguably one of the biggest evidence-bases behind any AAC system
- ❑ LAMP principles can be employed on most AAC systems, to reduce navigation, increase speed and autonomy
- ❑ Designed specifically with the autistic population in mind
- ❑ Qwerty keyboard analogy

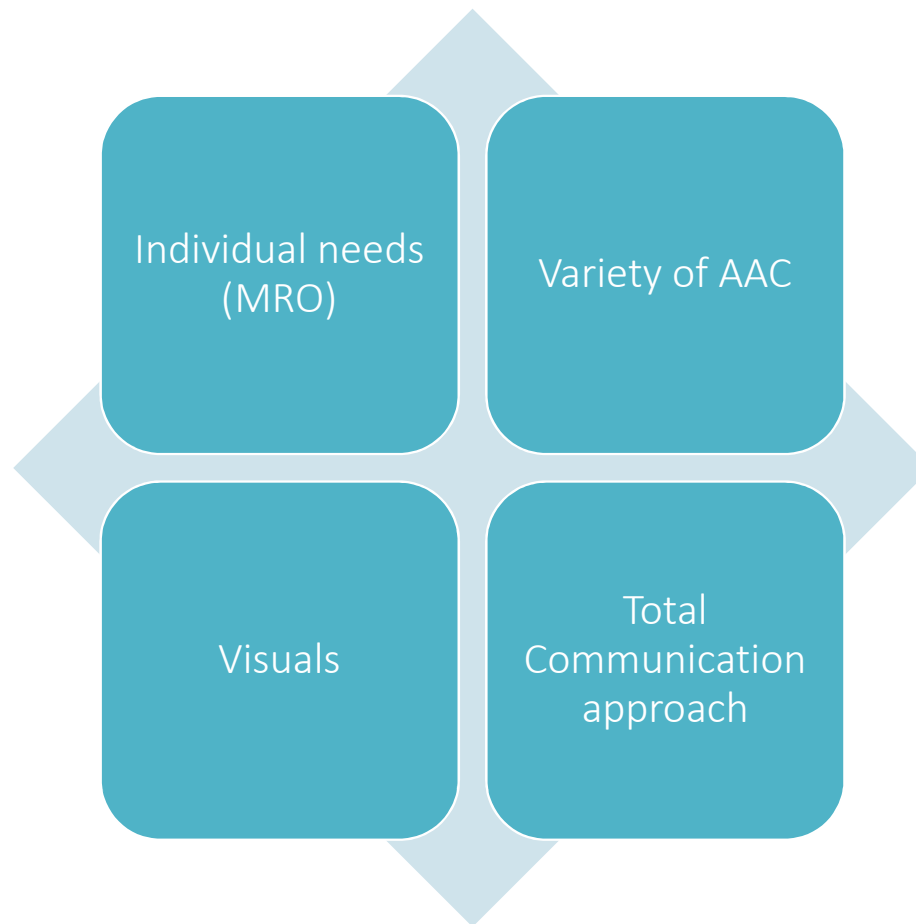www.liberator.co.uk/apps/lamp-words-for-life/about-lamp

Text-based AAC

❑ Not symbol-focussed, as other systems are.

❑ Should not be discounted because someone has a learning disability.

❑ Children with complex communication challenges *can and do* present with good literacy skills!

❑ Autistic children sometimes express a specific interest in letters, reading and spelling.

❑ Written language can be used to reduce pressure on social interactions

❑ Examples include predictive text, Proloquo4Text and Claricomm.

www.assistiveware.com/learn-aac/should-i-try-text-based-aac

Gestalt language processors

Script or 'gestalt'	Where we think it's from (eg: TV show/ family trip / breakfast routine etc)	Places child uses this script	Emotions attached to script	What we think it means	What it actually means

Summary: Being flexible

References

Alzayrer, N., M., Aldabas, R., Alhossein, A. and Alharti, H. (2021). Naturalistic teaching approach to develop spontaneous vocalisations and augmented communication in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication.* Vol 37 (1).

Light, J., C. and McNaughton, D. (2014). Communicative Competence for Individuals who require Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A new definition for a new era of communication? *Augmentative and Alternative Communication.* Vol 30 (1).

Logan, K., Iacono, T. and Trembath, D. (2017). A systematic review of research into aided AAC to increase social-communication functions in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication.* Vol 33 (1).

Konyn, L. (2023). *Gestalt language processing and AAC.* Available at: www.assistiveware.com/blog/gestalt-language-processing-aac [Last accessed 06/02/23]

Means, Reasons and Opportunities Model for Communication, in: Money D. Thurman S, (2002) Inclusive Communication. Speech and Language Therapy in Practice.

Roberts, J (2020). *The Problem with PECS.* [Online]. Available at: www.therapistndc.org/the-problem-with-pecs/?fbclid=PAAaahdnKh_86dmPf_KgrgvLqJRuRBkYp_NFdu-CN671-UQsRbQ25NPdgQ9Y4%23%3A~%3Atext%3DTherapist+Neurodiversity+Collective+does+not%2Cincluding+ABA=derived+therapy+models

Useful websites

For more information on the topics discussed, please visit the following websites:

www.RCSLT.org (search AAC)

www.assistiveware.com

www.liberator.co.uk

www.thinksmartbox.co.uk

www.uk.tobiidynavox.com

www.pecs-unitedkingdom.com

www.communicationmatters.org.uk

www.Acecentre.org.uk

www.autism.org.uk

Questions?