

# **A Starter-Set Vocabulary for Enhancement of Communication Curriculum and Functional Communication**

All people communicate for a variety of reasons.

There is a normal developmental progression of communicative functions that occurs which is well documented in speech-language therapy literature. The reasons to communicate that are listed on the chart that follows are present in all children between 9 - 16 months of age and remain through our lifetimes, albeit expressed with more linguistic sophistication.

For individuals who do not speak, many attempts to communicate are expressed through behaviors which have to be interpreted by a communication partner. This is frequently the case with young children or individuals with severe disabilities. However, once a reason to communicate has been recognized and communicated through a behavior, that communicative function is given a word and that word can be expressed through the person's AAC system. When expressed with a word, the intent is less open to misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

Individuals using AAC devices need to learn how to express a variety of language functions. Communication curriculum may start out having the person learn how to express a variety of language functions, using a single word, phrase, or sentence. After showing that he/she has a variety of reasons to communicate and is intentionally trying to communicate, the communication curriculum expands into the realm of real language acquisition. The joy of learning how to put words together begins, starting with 2 and 3 word combinations and growing from there.

In order for real language acquisition to occur, the individual using the AAC device needs access to single words. The "word" is the building block of language. The "words" are what is combined in different ways to create meaning and express thoughts. "Words" are what are practiced over and over until their meanings and nuances are experienced and learned.

**The following document outlines early reasons to communicate with a listing of words commonly used to express these functions. Then charts show how the words begin to be combined. Finally, 103 words are provided as a suggested "starter set of words." A demonstration display of only 36 words is provided to show what kind of real language output is possible, even with only 36 words.**

<b>Early Reasons to Communicate</b>	<b>Behavior Signals</b> = gestures, sounds, or eye pointing which directs the communication partner to ....	<b>Vocabulary Options</b>
nomination (naming)	name something (in response to a question or by pointing as he/she names)	names of things that, this thing, there
recurrence	give more of something he/she already has or had - repeat something that was done previously	more again
nonexistence	notice something does not exist or did not occur that was expected	no (book) (book) gone
disappearance	notice something has gone from a preceding context	away gone bye
cessation	cease an ongoing event or notice the event has ceased	stop
rejection	notice that a thing or action is not wanted	no, not
request object(s)	to provide some object which is usually out of reach	want, get please that, this
request action(s)	gestures, sounds, or eye pointing which directs the listener to act upon some object	do, put, get, want, come, go, play, up,
request assistance	assist in some activity or event	help, try, can't
request information	provide information	what, where, why, who, when
direct attention to self	notice what he/she has, wants, or needs	look, I, me, watch
direct action	complete a required action	do, out, get, down, off, find, take, watch
greet	recognize a greeting	hi, hello, hey
part	recognize departure	bye, goodbye
comment on object or action	notice something about an action or an object	good, big, put, get, like, down

## List of Starter Vocabulary

The following list of starter vocabulary contains words that are common among speakers and which cross all activities and communicative environments. This starter list was developed by reviewing the top 100 - 120 words found on a variety of word lists. Some of the most frequently used words (in the top 10) from the general lists of words have not been included in this starter set because they don't add substance to the message (i.e., a, the). Filler words, such as "yum" and "oh," have also not been included in the starter list. Some "little words" from the frequency lists made it to this starter vocabulary, such as generic prepositions and conjunctions, because of their critical value for later development of language.

<b>Adjectives:</b>	<b>Conjunctions:</b>	<b>Prepositions:</b>	<b>Preverbs:</b>	<b>Verbs:</b>
different	and	about	am/is/are	call
good	because	at	be/been	come
more	but	by	can	eat
	if	down	could	find
<b>Adverbs:</b>	or	for	do/does/did	get
again		from	have/has/had	go
almost	<b>Interjections:</b>	in	was/were	help
here	goodbye	of	will	know
much	hello	off	would	let
no	please	n		like
not	thank you	out	<b>Pronouns:</b>	make
now	<b>Nouns:</b>	over	I	need
really	day	to	you	put
there	people	up	he	say
tday	thing	with	she	take
tomorrow	time		it	tell
very	way	<b>Questions:</b>	we they	think
yes		how	me	try
	<b>Determiners:</b>	what	my	use
	any	when	mine	walk
	some	where	them	want
	that	who	your	watch
	this	why		work

## Sample Display of Vocabulary for Functional Communication

Individuals, if using this type of communication display on either a speech generating device or as a manual communication board, can express a variety of language functions and begin to practice simple 2 and 3 part sentences. Opportunity to practice language in this way is critical to the student's long-term expressive language and general communication development. (The words are obviously accompanied by an appropriate picture.)

How many combinations can be made with these words? In how many contexts can these words be used?

I	want	get	eat	more	what
you	do/did does	help	watch	good	when
it	put	stop	am/is are	now	where
that	come	like	was/ were	again	why
this	look	try	have/ has/had	almost	thing
not	find	watch	here	there	way

# The Development of Expressive Language using Multiple Word Combinations

Children, as they develop language, begin to combine single words into two word combinations around 20 - 26 months of age. Children and adults who do not speak need the same opportunity to combine words. Even individuals with severe disabilities with language ages of around 3 years have the potential for learning how to take single words and combine them into simple semantic relations.

Children continue to express the same reasons to communicate as they expressed with behaviors and then single words. The intent of what they are trying to communicate becomes more clear as they combine words together. The similar outcome is desired for individuals using AAC devices. By learning to combine 2 or 3 words together, their expressive communication is less open to misunderstanding or confusion. This starter vocabulary will grow as the need for more vocabulary grows.

## Types of Two-Word Utterances

<i>Functional Relations:</i>		<i>Semantic Relations:</i>	
existence	this book	agent-action	I go, you help
	that car	action-object	get that, like thing
	there mommy	agent-object	he book, they car
recurrence	more book	possessive	my book, that mine
	more juice	locative (object)	book table,
non-existence	no book	locative (action)	go there, put book
	mommy away	attribute	good juice
	juice gone	experiencer-state	I help, you go
rejection	no job	datives of indirect	give mommy, help
	no hat	objects	you
denial	no go, not do	commitatives	walk mommy
		instrumentals	put away
questioning	what's that, why	benefactors	for you, with me
	not		

## References

These references were used to develop the list of the top 100 - 120 most frequently used words.

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