

AAC in Language Recovery

Articles-at-a-Glance · Aphasia

Dietz, A., Wallace, S., & Weissling, K. (May 2020). Revisiting the Role of Augmentative and Alternative Communication in Aphasia Rehabilitation. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 29(2), 909–913. https://doi.org/10.1044/2019_AJSLP-19-00041

What question did the researchers try to answer?

They ask, “What is the real role of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in post-stroke aphasia rehabilitation.” The authors’ intent is to provide a viewpoint that expands the use of AAC in poststroke aphasia rehabilitation. They seek to clarify the role of AAC in both restorative and participation approaches to aphasia rehabilitation while also considering the role of AAC in a comprehensive treatment plan.

Background Information

In the past, AAC was seen mainly as a compensatory tool. Often, therapists waited to introduce AAC options because they thought a person with aphasia (PWA) would think it was a permanent solution. This was an issue because people did not have a way to communicate while working on language recovery, and family members were not educated on how to help them. We also know now that more participation-focused therapy is better for people with aphasia. Therapy trends are changing to focus more on the individual, their life, their goals, and improving their communication independence from day one.

The physical therapist does not wait for people to walk independently before allowing them to move around in their environment (Weissling & Prentice, 2010). Even people with mild weakness may have difficulty ambulating safely and may need assistive equipment (e.g., canes, walkers) to achieve walking goals. As such, why should PWA wait until they fully recover their language system before they communicate? The answer is simple: They shouldn’t! Instead, we should teach PWA how to use available AAC strategies immediately to compensate for word-finding issues they will experience, while guiding them to self-cue spoken language whenever possible.

Key Findings

The researchers suggest that AAC strategies and traditional restorative approaches are not mutually exclusive and that AAC can be viewed as a dual-purpose tool that can simultaneously support language function and compensation during breakdowns. In fact, new research is looking at brain imagery for using AAC and speech vs. brain activity when using only speech. They are also comparing aphasia therapy with AAC to aphasia therapy without AAC and noticing its power as a therapy tool. As knowledge about neural plasticity and language recovery advance, the authors are confident that AAC will become a vital aphasia rehabilitation tool that supports increased participation outcomes for PWA.

How can we apply this?

In this article, the versatility of AAC strategies is reviewed, with an emphasis on how AAC can be used to empower people with aphasia to fully participate and engage in life activities with increased independence. TD Snap Aphasia was created to be customised to meet the needs and preferences of the individual with aphasia. Personalised photos, names, and messages can be easily added into the Topics, Photo Albums, Whiteboard, and Word Lists. This solution can then be used not only when a communication breakdown occurs, but as a support during conversations and a tool during therapy and practice. More built-in dual-purpose tools include Scripts, Rating Scales, Whiteboard, and so much more.

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