

DEVELOPMENT OF  
EMOTIONAL  
COMPETENCIES IN AAC:  
AN AREA THAT DESERVES OUR ATTENTION

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# Handouts

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- Available at [www.augcominc.com](http://www.augcominc.com)
  - ▣ Article about emotion and AAC
  - ▣ Newsletter about AAC and interior dialogue
  - ▣ Power Point slides
  - ▣ Bibliography

# Emotions

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- Emotions play a key role in social interaction and communication
- The development of emotional competence underlies the development of other competencies AND one's overall quality of life

# Emotions

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- Emotions come from inside us
- Emotions are associated with feelings
- Emotions are often accompanied by physiological changes
- Our emotions may (or may not) relate to what's going on externally

# Emotions...continued

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- There is a sequence to emotional development
  - ▣ Emotion is initially expressed without awareness using non-linguistic modes.
  - ▣ Behaviors that express emotion are interpreted by caregivers (happy, sad, angry).
  - ▣ As children get older, emotions (and their expression) are mediated by social/cultural/linguistic factors
  - ▣ Increasingly, emotional development/competence requires language
  - ▣ Emotional competence involves communication with self (interior dialogue) and reflects the development of TOM

# What do we mean: Interior dialogue

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*“Private communications that are, at least potentially, under the conscious control of the individual and may be used to serve a variety of functions.”*

ACN, volume 16#4

[www.augcominc.com](http://www.augcominc.com)

*“To Light’s list, we would add a fifth purpose—to communicate with oneself or conduct an internal dialogue.”*  
Beukelman & Mirenda, 2005



# Interior Dialogue

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- Initially may be overt: “self-talk”
- Becomes covert: (emotional regulation, rehearsal, self-reflection, creativity, practice/mastery, self-organizing, self-actualization)
- Involves Theory of Mind

More later

Ability to perceive, use and manage emotions essential to social and communication development and competence

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## Why Consider Emotional Development in AAC?

- It's a "DUH!" Should not be an 'after thought' of AAC intervention and/or AAC research
- Must consider BOTH comprehension AND expression of emotions in self AND in others
- Can't assume "it'll all work out."



Observe emotional components of this interaction



# Discussion

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- What emotions does the baby express?
- How does baby express emotion?
- What emotions does adult express?
- How does adult express emotion?
- What's missing?

**Key role of language in communication  
AND  
emotional development!**

# Children grow up!

Infancy Toddler Preschool School years Young-Middle-Older  
Aged-Adults



What happens here .....affects what happens here



# Emotion and AAC

Addressing and identifying unmet needs in the field

# Maslow's hierarchy of human needs

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Maslow, A. (1970).  
*Motivation and personality*  
(2nd ed.). New York:  
Harper & Row.



Lower end: respect from others (status, recognition, fame, prestige, attention)

Higher end: From personal experiences, development of specific competencies.

Children:  
family, friends

Adults: family, friends, lovers, spouse, colleagues, children

Children : order, rituals, structure

Adults : income, savings, insurance, religion, science, philosophy

Basic & strongest

Basic & strongest

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

If the need is not met  
the person feels....

- restless and bored, with a lack of zest for life
- life is meaningless, boring without purpose
- a tendency to avoid growth and development
- listless

- fearful of criticism
- inferior, weak and helpless
- fearful of failure, and of risks (e.g. fear of new situations or learning activities etc.)
- fearful, frustrated, or angry toward those who withhold respect e.g. a teacher, school or college
- envy and bitterness

Persistent thwarting leads to neurotic compensation

- chronic showing off; attention seeking; arrogance,
- or shyness and withdrawal

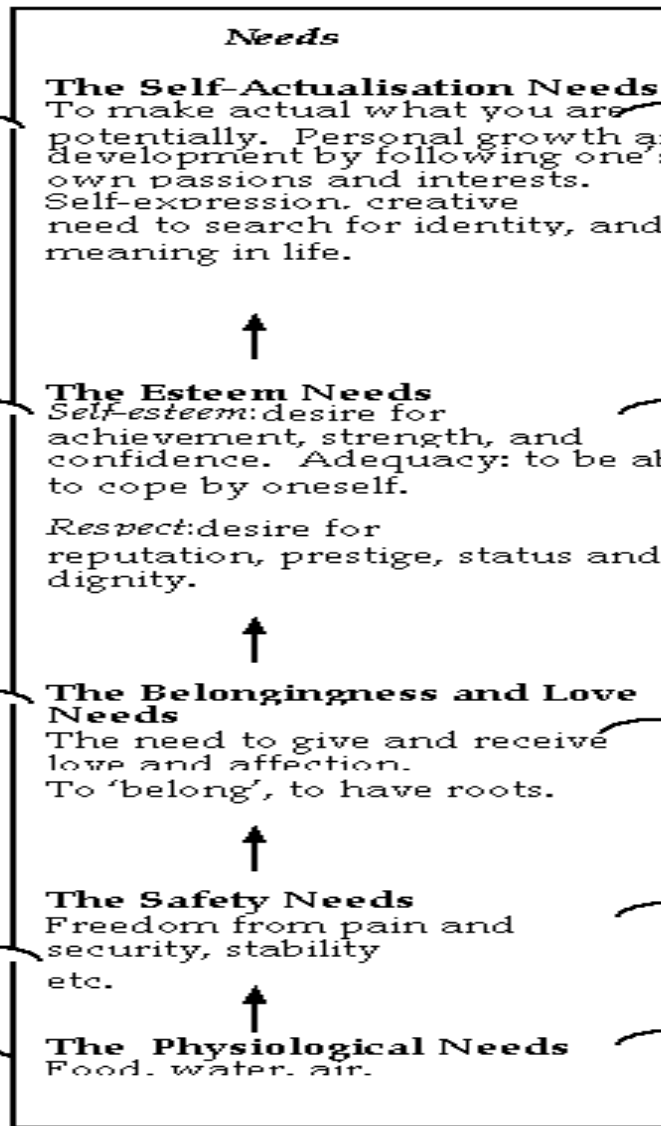
- lonely, rejected, and rootless
- strong conformity to norms
- dislike or hostility towards 'out-groups': racism etc

Persistent thwarting leads to neurotic compensation

- maladjustment and hostility... or withdrawal

- anxiety, dread,
- fight-and-flight behaviour

craving for food, water



If the need is met  
the person feels....

- a desire to grow and develop in the direction of their higher values.
- creative, positive & energetic
- unselfish desire to make a useful contribution
- curious, and open to experiences
- a desire to think for themselves
- a growing sense of identity

- self-confident, content,
- self-belief & self-respect
- prepared to take risks and try something new. E.g. to learn cooperatively, generous kindly
- esteem needs become less and 'higher' needs take their place

- they can love themselves, and others
- they can trust friends and loved ones, and give them freedom
- these needs become less and 'higher' needs take their place

- physical security
- safety needs become less, 'higher' needs take their place

- no physiological craving
- these needs die away and 'higher' needs take their place

Maslow said these needs are rather like vitamins in that

- we can never be healthy without them
- a long term deficiency causes 'disease'
- there are no substitutes for them.

That is, a child who is aggressive or attention seeking can only be 'cured' of this behaviour by getting their esteem and belonging needs met, punishment can never produce a long term 'cure'.

# Challenges for people with CCN

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- **Common Thread:** Difficulty with expression and/or comprehension of communication elements
- **Multi-handicapped:** vision, hearing, motor, speech, language, cognitive, communication, social, emotional, behavioral, challenges.
- **Developmental/Acquired disabilities:** face different issues
- **Family members often emotionally impacted:**
  - Physical care, equipment issues, myths about AAC, own day-to-day realities, changing roles, limited social networks, and so on

# Adults with acquired disabilities

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- Diverse Group: chronic/degenerative/temporary; pre-existing coping abilities
  
- Issues that relate to emotional competence
  - Adjusting to new realities.
  - Limited access to communication tools/supports
  - Adjusting to shifts in social roles and relationships
  - Financial concerns
  - Guilt, anger, helplessness
  - Loss of sense of “self”
  - Inability to engage in preferred activities
  - End of life issues



# Adults with developmental disabilities

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- Diverse Group: variety of disabilities and life experiences
- Issues that relate to emotional competence
  - Limited access to communication tools/supports
  - Friendships/relationships
  - Restricted Social networks
  - Education: Access to, quality, attitude, resources
  - Underemployment
  - Limited recreational options
  - Risk factors that increase likelihood of abuse
- **Pittsburgh Employment Conference 2009**  
*AAC and depression.*
- **ACOLUG** postings reflect frustration, sadness, anger from parents and adults who use AAC
- Literature

# Themes:

Frustration, Isolation, Humor, Sadness, Love, Anger, Joy

## Failure to

watching the second hand of my watch

dragging itself around in those microscopic bits  
of eternity  
around  
and around  
and  
sitting:  
staring at the dull point of my pencil  
I look deep into myself  
and see nothing  
to call my own.

[well, that's not exactly true]

I have my Writer's Block to have and to hold...  
til death do us part.  
I've always wanted to be a famous writer:  
Pulitzer caliber.  
Yet... here I am;  
a writer with no words...  
The day's last poem wring from my fingertips  
and the  
treacherous paper pleads MORE !!!  
Where is my Muse when I need her?

[more than likely talking dirty to my agent for 5 cents a word]

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## Communicate

I mean,  
when I'm not ready to write...  
like when I'm driving,  
or I'm at a movie theater,  
or I'm sitting on the toilet,  
my Brother AX525 word processor  
unplugged in the corner.  
My Compaq 586 out being serviced [again].  
my Muse finds it amusing  
to fill my head with lavish plots  
for 1000 page epic novels  
overflowing with raven haired heroes  
and flaxen haired damsels  
with landscapes of monumental proportions.

[ideas flow like honey from the Horn o'Plenty]

But when I sit down to write...  
to really write...  
the bitch takes a sabbatical.  
and leaves me standing here.  
My proverbial pants down around my ankles.  
Buck ass naked  
Without  
even a rejection slip  
to  
hide  
my shame.

- Jack Wright, USA

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# Children's Perspectives

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## BELOVED

Rebecca Beayni, Canada



Clay



Beneath the Surface

## CHRISTMAS

Christopher Engels, South Africa

Presents  
Roast turkey  
Exciting crackers banging  
Fun and laughter never ends  
Jesus' birthday

## FLYING

Christopher Engels, South Africa

flying, flying up in the trees  
where there isn't much of a breeze  
flying up high in the trees  
where he likes everything he sees  
until BOOM he falls onto his knees  
he isn't pleased  
to fall onto his knobby knees  
he can't fly so he leaves  
it to the bumble bees



Beneath the Surface

# Multi-modal expression

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## LOVE

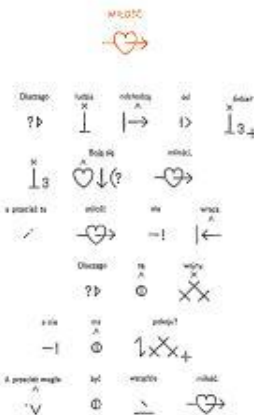
Joanna Mikołajczuk, Poland

From the Polish:

Why do people take leave of themselves?  
They fear love, yet love does not return.  
Why are there wars and not peace?  
Yet everywhere there can be love.

From the Bliss:

Why do people set themselves apart?  
They are afraid of love.  
That love will not be returned.  
Why are there wars?  
Why are we not peaceful?  
Love is possible anywhere.



Beneath the Surface

## CAT NAP

Nir Slav, Israel



Oil and Acrylic



Beneath the Surface

# Research about emotional development and disability

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- AAC: VERY limited (nonspecific)
- Other disciplines? Psychology, SLP, Deaf Ed, MR, Autism
  - **Typical.** Article assessing emotion recognition in 9-15 yo (Psychology)
  - **Language impaired.** Understanding emotions in context: ability to infer emotions in children with language impairments
  - **Deaf.** Social and emotional development of deaf children
  - **Asperser's syndrome.** Perception of basic emotions from speech prosody as compared to typical kids
  - **“Mental retardation”.** Article discusses paucity of studies and suggests areas of study

Emerges within a social and cultural framework of experiences

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## What is Emotional Competence

**Having the functional skills to recognize, interpret, and respond constructively to emotions in oneself and others.**

Griffiths & Scarantino (2009); Saarni (1999)

# Development of Emotional Competence

## A Framework (Western influence) Saarni, 1999

1. Awareness of own emotions	5. Ability to differentiate internal subjective emotional experiences from external emotional expression
2. Ability to discern/ understand the emotions of others	6. Capacity for adaptive coping with aversive emotions and distressing circumstances
3. Ability to use the vocabulary of emotion and expression	7. Awareness of emotional communication within relationships
4. Capacity for empathic involvement	8. Emotional self-efficacy in accord with one's moral sense

- How individuals deal with emotion varies widely (social, cultural, familial, experience, factors).
- The degree to which someone can access language/communication tools and use them effectively to interact and “self-regulate” will affect their development of emotional competence.



# Development of emotional competence in AAC: Challenges

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## Individuals with CCN

- Physical limitations
- Cognitive limitations that may restrict development of TOM
- Emotional expressions are misinterpreted/ignored
- Limited access to emotion language
- Current SGDs lack inflection, volume & pitch modulation, timing nuances, etc.
- Hard to find a good therapist

## Partners/facilitators

- Often undervalue emotional issues/expressions... distracted by disability, SGDs, day-to-day issues, job descriptions, their own feelings, etc.
- Often focus on using 'AAC' to reduce inappropriate behaviors
- May lack knowledge/skills in the area of emotional competence
- May not have expertise/good strategies for understanding/dealing with emotional issues in self or others

# Problems with current AAC focus

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CURRENT FOCUS	PROBLEM WITH IT
1. Teach symbols	1. limited sets...happy, sad, mad
2. Decrease behavioral problems/reduce/replace inappropriate behaviors.	2. Functional Communication Training, etc. is great and efficacious, but ignores sequence of emotional development
3. Provide ways to “regulate” emotions/behavior	3. Schedules, calendars, emotion wheels, etc. are great, but in many cases ignores sequence of development related to emotional regulation
4. Teach use of AAC tools and technologies	5. Problems with AAC technologies...see next slide

# Problems with AAC technologies

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- Do not support paralinguistic aspects
  - ▣ inflection, intonation, nonlinguistic sounds, timing, sarcasm, loudness features, etc.
- Speech synthesizers difficult to personalize
- Do not support “just-in-time” emotional expression
  - ▣ Representation and organization not conducive to use
  - ▣ Timing issues

# CLINICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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## DEVELOPMENT of Emotional Competence

Having the functional skills to recognize, interpret, and respond constructively to emotions in oneself and others.

Griffiths & Scarantino (2009); Saarni (1999)

# Early Development of Emotional Competence

Saarni, 1999

<b>1. Awareness of own emotions</b>	Label/talk about emotions across environments
<b>2. Ability to discern and understand the emotions of others</b>	Identify situations that cause emotions. <i>Talk about/point out the child's emotions, your own and other's emotions</i>
<b>3. Ability to use the vocabulary of emotion and expression</b>	Provide ways to express broad variety of emotions using linguistic and non-linguistic modes. Consider both overt expression & interior dialogue.
<b>4. Capacity for empathic involvement</b>	Help child understand others have different emotions about same experience

What might dad have done to acknowledge/  
support emotional development?



# Clinical assessment: Relevant Questions re: Emotional Development

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- Can person recognize and label his/her own emotions accurately? Which ones?
- What emotions is person unable to recognize and/or express?
- Does person have access to appropriate /adequate emotion vocabulary? Can they use it?
- What communication modes does person use to express which emotions? Are they effective across settings and partners?
- Are there times others do not recognize (or ignore) the person's emotional expressions? When? Why?
- Can the person create short narratives that include descriptions of emotion?
- Can person recognize/label emotions in others?
- Can person use strategies for dealing with emotions in situations that are emotionally "charged"?

# Intervention ideas: Input

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- **Label emotions** (as they are happening) using words/symbols/signs.
- **Identify situations** that cause an emotional response. Then, talk about feelings in advance.
- **Talk to a child about his/her emotions** using symbols/signs/words. Point to symbols on a display or use the child's device in natural settings.
- **Talk to a child about another person's emotions**, while pointing to symbols/using signs.
- Help a child learn how his/her **emotions might be the same or different** from how a friend feels/behaves.
- **Discuss narratives** (stories, events, etc.) to expand access to a range of more complex emotions and teach ways to express them.



# Intervention ideas: Output

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- Provide access to words that describe emotions and encourage their use
  - Get WAY beyond *happy, sad, angry*
    - *Confused, frustrated, hopeful, mad, disappointed*
- Encourage “emotion talk” in natural settings
- Accept and encourage use all modes to express emotion
- Provide opportunities to develop narratives that describe events, stories, fantasy
- Role play/dramatic play to enact scenarios that depict situations with emotional content.

# What can we ask families to do?

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## **Ask caregivers to**

1. Learn about the development of emotional competence
2. Talk about their own emotions
3. Acknowledge/name what person who uses AAC is feeling and trying to express
4. Use symbols/pictures that depict emotion words in everyday activities
5. Develop a bedtime routine that helps child describe their day and feelings about it.

## **Point out emotions during storybook reading.**

1. Talk about how characters are feeling
2. Talk about how child may be feeling about the story.

# Later Development of Emotional Competence

Saarni, 1999

<b>4. Capacity for empathic involvement</b>	Understanding of others emotional reactions
<b>5. Ability to differentiate internal subjective emotional experiences from external emotional expression</b>	Learn about mixed emotions. Learn emotional display rules
<b>6. Capacity for adaptive coping with aversive emotions and distressing circumstances</b>	Learn how to regulate emotion in oneself and others
<b>7. Awareness of emotional communication within relationships</b>	Empathy, emotional regulation, etc.
<b>8. Emotional self-efficacy in accord with one's moral sense</b>	Self actualization, moral code, beliefs

**Theory of Mind**

# Empathy, Self-Regulation/ Modulation, Self-Efficacy

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- Higher level skills
  - ▣ Theory Of Mind
  - ▣ Interior Dialogue
- Require access to language to negotiate meaning and social relationships
- Since much is internalized, we may only see behaviors that hint at difficulties or development

# Theory of Mind (in a nutshell)

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- “Children use ToM to construct the type of inner world and inner communication that enable them to work through tough emotional situations and to develop emotional stability and coping mechanisms.”
- Begins to emerge in preschool, but doesn’t develop fully until later in childhood (and beyond).

Astington & Baird, 2005; Schneider, Lockl, & Fernandez, 2005 and so on.

# Interior dialogue (self-talk)

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*“Private communications that are, at least potentially, under the conscious control of the individual and may be used to serve a variety of functions.”*

ACN, volume 16#4

[www.augcominc.com](http://www.augcominc.com)

*“To Light’s list, we would add a fifth purpose—to communicate with oneself or conduct an internal dialogue.”*  
*Beukelman & Mirenda, 2005*



# Interior Dialogue Tools

ACN, volume 16#4. Go to [www.augcominc.com](http://www.augcominc.com)

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<b>Functions</b>	<b>Some AAC examples</b>
<b>Emotional regulation</b>	<i>Feelings Book; Emotion wheel; Social Stories; Daily/weekly schedules.</i>
<b>Rehearsal</b>	Stored messages on a device or prepared in a communication book/board. Using a device/board to practice without an interlocutor.
<b>Self-reflection</b>	Accessible diaries, journals, paper and pencil with privacy protection/encryption.
<b>Creativity</b>	Accessible drawing, painting, music, drama, creative writing, etc. opportunities with appropriate materials.
<b>Practice/ mastery</b>	Depends on what someone <u>wants</u> to learn, e.g., computer with appropriate software, AAC device, accessible chess set, etc. For example, may include strategies to teach visualization techniques.
<b>Self-organizing/ memory</b>	Make lists, schedules, use planning strategies. AAC devices may have alarms or other memory aids ( accessible daily/weekly planners, PDAs).
<b>Self-actualization</b>	Opportunities to read/explore a range of processes offered through art, cultural and spiritual activities.

# Research evidence: Down Syndrome: Young adults in the UK

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- Glenn and Cunningham (17-24 years)
  - ▣ “Self-talk” or “private speech” widely observed (91% )
  - ▣ Talking to objects, self-dialoguing, giving selves directions, describing activities , muttering.
  - ▣ No correlation between young people’s private speech and behavior problems, communication difficulties or social isolation.



# Cont. Adults with DS in Illinois

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- Chicoine, McGuire and Greenbaum
  - ▣ 81 percent of 500 adults (median age = 34)
  - ▣ Reflected emotional intensity of the individual's daily life.
  - ▣ Did not signal a psychosis or mental disorder BUT cautioned that a dramatic shift in the amount of an individual's self-talk might signify a situational or mental health problem.
  - ▣ Functions of self-talk: Problem solve, vent feelings, entertain themselves and process the events of their daily lives

## AAC Research and Practice – Behavior management

### Behavior management/‘emotional regulation’

Modify/“fix” inappropriate/ disruptive behaviors



Minimal, if any, consideration of emotional development/level of competence

What about the emotional development/  
competencies of persons with behavioral  
challenges?

# Behavior management and emotional regulation

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An ability to manage one's emotions presupposes that emotional competencies at earlier levels are achieved.

1. Awareness of own emotions
2. Ability to discern/understand others
3. Ability to use vocabulary of emotion and expression
-  4. Capacity for empathic involvement
5. Ability to differentiate internal subjective emotional experiences from external emotional expression
-  6. Capacity for adaptive coping with aversive emotions and distressing circumstances
7. Awareness of emotional communication within relationships
8. Emotional self-efficacy in accord with one's moral sense

(Saarni, 1999)

# AAC Research and Practice – Vocabulary/Language

## Symbols

More concerned with representation

Very limited emotion vocabularies in both type/ nuances and number of symbols

Often NOT taught in naturalistic settings, but rather as a “group” to express feelings

## Language

Concerns focus on wants/needs; social etiquette/closeness and information exchange

Minimal attention to interior dialogue

Emotional features are key component of pragmatics, especially in AAC!

# Emotion vocabularies in typical kids

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- 221 primary students and 112 secondary students described scene about emotional state and generate single words to describe feeling.
  - Produced 21,000 words total
  - Mean of 97 (SD 35)
  - Over 14 yo significantly more words than younger kids
  - Girls more than boys
  - 25 most frequent words in 10 categories included.

Doost, H., Moradi, A., Taghavi, M, Yule, W, Dalgleish, T. (1999). The development of a corpus of emotional words produced by children and adolescents. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 27: 433-451.

# AAC Research and Practice: Literacy/ Narrative Development

## Literature and literacy instruction

- Classic children's literature
- Reading curricula (e.g., ALL Curriculum)
- Social stories
- Personal books
- Different genres
- Photo Albums (Talking)
- Computer activities

## Websites

- [www.accessiblebookcollection.org](http://www.accessiblebookcollection.org)
- <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/District75/Departments/Literacy/AdaptedBooks/default>
- <http://tarheelreader.org>
- <http://aacliteracy.psu.edu>

# Role of narrative

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- Help establish personal and social identity
- Fundamental to the development of overall communicative competence
- Involves coordination of a variety of knowledge structures and linguistic abilities.

# Importance of Personal and Fictional Narratives

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- Children who use AAC experience significant difficulties in the production of fictional and personal narratives.
- Specific interventions are needed



# Studies

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- Enhancing the Personal Narrative Skills of Elementary School-Aged Students Who Use AAC: The Effectiveness of Personal Narrative Intervention

[Soto, G., Solomon-Rice, P. & Caputo, M. (2009). *Journal of Communication Disorders*. 42:1, 43-57. ]

- Supporting the development of narrative skills of an eight-year old child who uses an AAC device

[Soto, G., Yu, B. & Henneberry, S. (2007). *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 27-45]

# Studies (cont.)

51

- Analysis of Narratives Produced by Four Children Who Use AAC

[Soto, G. & Hartmann, E. (2006). *Journal of Communication Disorders*. 39:6, 456-480.]

- Using written stories to support the use of narrative in conversational interactions: Case study,

[Waller, A., O'Mara, D., Tait, L., Booth, L., Brophy-Arnott, B., Hood, H. (2001). *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, Augmentative and Alternative Communication*. 17: 4, 221-232.]

## Clinical Assessment: Relevant Questions (later development)

1. What skills does the person demonstrate?
2. Does person have access to a range of tools and techniques that support emotional expression? How use them?
3. Does person understand emotions others express? mixed emotions?
4. Does person have access to tools and strategies that support “interior dialogue”?
5. Can person manage emotion during difficult situations? How?
6. How does person manage communication breakdowns?
7. How does person manage situations where partners act inappropriately? Rudely?
8. Can the person create narratives that include descriptions of their own and other’s emotions?
9. Does person understand emotional content in stories/books?
10. What strategies does person use when dealing with complex situations. Can they regulate their own/other’s emotions? How do they do it?

## **Talk about mixed emotions while modeling the use of symbols/words.**

“Hmmm...your face tells me you may not be sure HOW you feel. What do you think?”

## **Talk about hiding ones emotions.**

“Sometimes it’s a good idea to hide how your feeling. I thought you had very reason to be angry, but you just smiled.” Good going! How did you really feel?”

# Intervention Ideas

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- Build on developmental sequence of emotions across partners and settings
- Acknowledge the need to develop interior dialogues. Provide tools that accommodate people with CCN.
- Encourage all modes of expression, including creative (poetry, fiction, drawing, music, acting)
- Provide a range of tools and techniques that support more complex emotional expression
- Use literature, movies, TV, personal narratives to encourage emotional development.

# Intervention tools

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Use strategies that highlight emotion

- Emotion wheel
- Social stories
- Stories about kids with disabilities
- Movies about people with disabilities
- Social groups
- Theatre/role playing
- Other ideas?

# Authenticity

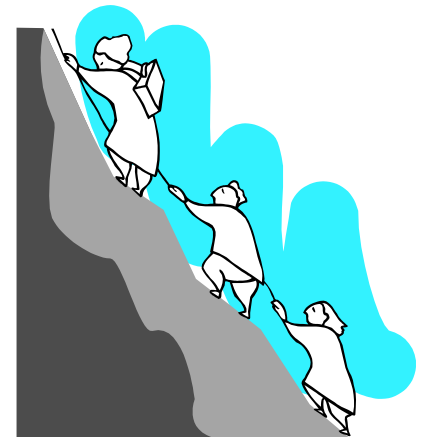
56

- ❑ Be an “authentic” partner.
- ❑ If you don’t understand, admit it. It’s a teaching moment.
- ❑ Talk about how YOU feel and encourage emotional expression.
- ❑ Teach person to use specific strategies that help regulate their own emotions as well as support partners
- ❑ When you engage in interactions where you are “testing”, be honest.
  - ❑ “We’re going to play a stupid game where I pretend I don’t understand.”

# Take Away Messages

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1. We need to address emotional development
2. We need to do so using an existing framework
3. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. Others are ahead of us.
4. We need ACTION: Research, AAC technologies, Clinical practice
5. What else?





# END

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1. Introduce yourself.
2. Ask person to show you how he or she communicates. How do you indicate YES? How do you indicate NO? Do you use a communication board? Do you use a communication device? Can you show me how the system works?
3. Don't feel you have to keep talking all the time. Relax and get used to a different pattern of interaction.
4. Pause and wait for the person to respond or construct a message. Be patient. It might take while.
5. Give the person an opportunity to ask you questions or make comments.
6. Don't finish the person's message unless you first ask permission.
7. Interact at eye level if at all possible.
8. Pay close attention to facial expressions and gestures.
9. Be honest. If you don't understand, admit it. Ask the person to tell you again, perhaps in a different way.
10. Talk directly to the person.