

Using Fun Apps to Motivate Communication

Why should communication be motivating?

Communication should be fun! Think about all the reasons you communicated today – greeting people, sharing something funny that happened to you yesterday, requesting your favourite coffee and more! Now think of some of the goals we have for individuals who are learning to use a communication system – request to go toilet, request help when they don't really want to do that activity - These don't sound super fun and motivating, so why should they put effort into using their communication system? These are important and functional goals but should be worked on when the individual is able to use their communication system a bit more independently and understands the power of being able to communicate with AAC.

In the words of Rachel Madel **“Inspire don't require”!*** This is the mantra we'd love to see when teaching communication! Requiring someone to say a certain word will not lead to autonomous communication in the future.

Have a think about the activities you have been using. Are they **silly, weird, interesting, surprising or novel?** These are the types of activities that inspire someone to communicate in an authentic way rather than being coerced or it feeling artificial. Try putting aside your own agenda and think about how to bring as many smiles and laughs into the next activity or game you play!

(Graphic from Nathan Wallis - <https://www.facebook.com/nathanwallisxfactoreducation/photos/a.2099641410053306/2585467534804022>)

“Scientists have recently determined that it takes approximately 400 repetitions to create a new synapse in the brain - unless it is done with play, in which case it takes between 10 and 20 repetitions.”

*Dr Karyn Purvis
Artist unknown*

Evidence that human physiology is fine-tuned for learning through play. All children know that, can we catch up?



What apps could I try?

Here are some ideas of how you could use a range of fun apps to motivate and inspire communication.

Dr Panda Restaurant (there are lots of apps available from the Dr Panda app developer!)

<https://drpanda.com/games/dr-panda-restaurant-3>

There is so much to talk about while managing your very own restaurant! Tell Dr Panda to 'cut it more' or that you 'want different' ingredients, that the pizza 'needs to cook more', that he needs to 'clean up' or that there is a 'problem!' – Perhaps he left the stove on and the pan caught fire or that the pot is boiling over. Remember to use your core words if you don't have the exact vocabulary (e.g. you could say 'water too hot, water go out' to talk about boiling over'). You can also comment on whether you think the customers 'like' or 'don't like' the food and whether you made a 'nice crazy or silly' meal.



Toca Hair Salon (there are lots of other apps available from the Toca Boca app developer if doing hair isn't your thing!)

<https://tocaboca.com/app/toca-hair-salon-4/>

You start by choosing a character – you don't need to have the exact names (like 'monster') but can use core words like 'that one' or 'little girl'. Next use your describing words to describe what colour, shape or size you want the character's hair, makeup or face paint and clothes. You might say you need 'more' hairspray or that you are 'finished' with the shampoo. You could use prepositions to talk about putting sunglasses 'on' or taking a jacket 'off'. You might comment that their hair is 'dirty' and needs a 'wash' to 'get it clean'. At the end you can take a screen shot and comment on what you think of the character – do they look 'crazy, silly, beautiful' or something else?

Have a look at another favourite Toca Boca app called **Toca Kitchen** for lots of food inspired fun or working on social skills like recognising body language and facial expressions to comment on whether the character 'likes' or 'don't like' the team you created!



My PlayHome <http://www.myplayhomeapp.com/>

This app is a digital doll house where you can choose a character and then practice different routines, such as pretending the character is getting up in the morning (e.g. Oh, she has to 'get up'. It's time to 'go down' stairs. I think' she wants food'. She is 'hungry'. Let's 'open' the fridge. 'What' should' she eat'? 'She wants more' milk.) This app is great for working on following direction and asking questions in a really fun way! You can also target different concepts such as prepositions



(e.g. let's turn the TV 'off', turn the lights 'on', put the pizza 'in' the oven, take the milk 'out' the fridge) or verbs (e.g. let's make him 'jump', he can 'sit', she is 'cutting/cooking/dancing/eating'). Remember that you don't need the exact name for an item in the house, you can use your core words to describe it (e.g. tap on the 'big blue one you sleep in' to describe the double bed).

My PlayHome School, Hospital and other versions of this app are now also available!

Sago Mini Road Trip <https://sagomini.com/apps/road-trip/>

If you love transport vehicles, then this will be a favourite! You can start by packing all your clothes by saying 'put in' 'get more' clothes and then you can choose a car by saying whether you 'like' or 'don't like' the car or describing the colour of the car you want or saying 'not that one'. Then you can target words like 'go' 'stop' and 'fly' (or 'up' if you don't have 'fly' on your communication system). Describe the road conditions (e.g. it's 'rainy', 'bumpy', the road it going 'up' a mountain) or talk about needs to 'stop' and 'wash' (or 'clean up) the car or 'get more' fuel.



Check out these ideas from Maddie and Angela from WeSpeakPODD playing Sims on the iPad:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFJ4LzZ5fyg&t=76s&ab_channel=WeSpeakPODD

Here are some ideas from Rachel Madel for some other app ideas like PODD or Barnyard:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=accTgqJ9jTo>

Tips

- **Play TOGETHER and make it interactive**

The goal of using these apps is to inspire or motivate communication, so you can't just open up the app, hand the iPad over and then leave. Be present, enjoy the game, take turns, make lots of comments and play together!

- **The adult always has control over the games tablet**

Don't let the activity descend into a battle of who gets to hold the iPad. Establish at the start that you will hold the tablet nice and close when playing the game but can put it on your lap or to one side when you are chatting on the communication system. Establishing those boundaries as soon as you start playing avoids the battle. This allows the focus to be on the interaction, not just on the tablet.

- **Decrease demands / increase invitations**

In the past, we have expected individuals who use AAC to 'show' us that they know where words are located on their communication systems and what those words mean. We made lots of demands on them, which is like continually testing them. Instead we should be teaching them through increasing the number of invitations we give them to communicate about motivating topics! Look how different the morning tea interaction example

what they know, verses inviting them to communicate because communication looks and sounds like so much fun! It is such a subtle shift in our language from telling what to say, to inviting communication.

Decrease Demands



"Where's *cake*?"

"Show me *cake*"

"Find *cake*"

"Tell me on your device"

Increase Invitations



"Mmm *cake*!"

"Let's *eat cake*"

"It looks like you want *cake*"

"You could tell me if you want *cake*"

Graphic from <https://www.rachelmadel.com/>

- **Have two separate tablets if you use high tech AAC**

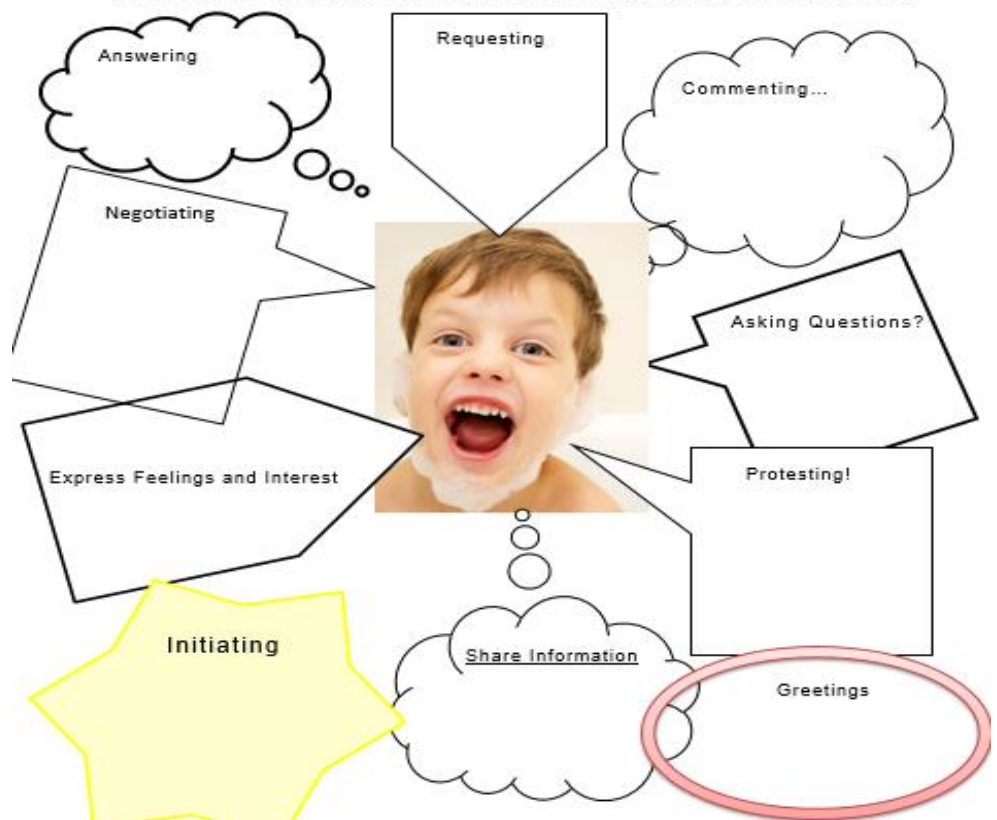
Use one tablet to play the game on and make sure your AAC app is on a different device. This way you can talk about what is happening in the motivating game as the same time as playing. This also ensure that the AAC device is only for communication.

- **Model a wide range of language functions not just requesting**

We use language for so many purposes beyond simply talking about what we want.

We can create opportunities to give individuals the option to comment/protest/ask and answer questions/tell stories/describe things/tell a joke/greet people/ talk about feelings while playing these motivating apps.

Ideas to ensure you are using Assistive Technology to meet a range of communication functions:



*Reference:

<https://ussaac.org/speakup/articles/inspiring-communication/>

Created by Jessamy Bell (Speech Language Therapist) on 10 October 2020