(The Speechie Show Ep.20)

Welcome to the Speechie Show! Being a speech-language pathologist often means having too much work and not enough planning time. To beat the overwhelm, we’re bringing you the tricks and tools that will make your job a little bit easier.

**Carrie**: We are here with Susan Berkowitz, and we are talking about AAC. How are you today Susan?

**Susan**: I am fine. How are you?

**Carrie**: Doing great! Glad to have you on. Today we are going to be talking about implementation strategies for AAC. So, Susan is going to be sharing with us her favorite 5 tips for AAC and how to get started with that. If you are new to the show, I am Carrie Clark from speechandlanguagekids.com and this is the Speechie Show. Each week I interview a new guest and we talk about on topic and explore it in a little bit of depth and then we do some giveaways. So, today we're talking AAC with Ms. Susan Berkowitz. Why don't you take a minute and introduce yourself Susan?

**Susan**: Ok. I've been a speech and language pathologist since 1978, which means almost 40 years.

**Carrie**: Wow!

**Susan**: I still can't quite believe that. And I actually was doing augmentative vocation back then.

**Carrie**: That's even more impressive.

**Susan**: We were teaching kids with autism sign language and we were using bliss symbols for a lot of kids with CP and that was about the extent of AAC back then.

**Carrie**: Wow. So, are you still doing AAC now?

**Susan**: I am. I run my own private practice and I do a lot of consulting for school districts and staff training. As well as, independent evaluations and workshops and seminars and things. Still hanging in.

**Carrie**: Perfect, alright. Well today we are talking about AAC and sharing implementation strategies. So, if you are watching with us live, go ahead and comment in with what AAC platforms or software, or devices, or systems your students are using. We want to see what everybody is up to out there. So, go ahead and type those into the comments and we're going to share with you today 5 points about implementation for AAC. So, let's jump right into those. The first thing we want to talk about today is aided stimulation. Susan, talk to us about what aided stimulation is and how that can be used for children for AAC.

**Susan**: Ok the simplest way to explain aided language stimulation is to think of it as modeling. When we are teaching kids to use picture based communication, we're giving them a totally different language format than they have ever seen used or heard people. And much like kids, typical kids, learn language by listening to us talk and by imitating us and playing with words. So, kids with augmentative communication need that input to understand what the pictures mean and how to find the ones that they want and how to use them. So, modeling is the biggest key strategy when you are starting to teach kids to use picture based communication. You want to think of it as foreign language immersion. It's like a foreign language. And if the people around the kids aren't using the pictures when they talk to them, when they're explaining, when they're labeling, when they're commenting, then he's got no good way to get ahold of that language and become confident. So, and that strategy was first discussed back in the 1980's. Carol Goossens published about it in the late 1980's. But it's one of those things that people just kind of forgot about for a long time and it's really back in the forefront for practices, for evidence based practices for AAC.

**Carrie**: Absolutely, I love using this. I think one of the challenges I guess to this that I often see, especially with like classroom teachers, is that they feel very overwhelmed trying to use the device themselves and they feel uncomfortable doing it. So, do you recommend you have to touch a button for every word you say? Or do you try to ease into it with try to push a button here and there using every word you can?

**Susan**: Right. You know when I say we want to do language stimulation all the time I get the deer in the headlights look from people. It's like Oh My God and then immediately they're overwhelmed and we don't want that. Because if they are overwhelmed, they are not going to use the system. So, I generally say pick one activity that you are comfortable with that you know the kid will be engaged with and plan out what you are going to say. What core keywords are you going to use during that activity. Figure out where they are on the communication system so that you can use them comfortably. And just get comfortable with that one interaction, that one time or activity. And then when you are comfortable with that, add another one and build it up gradually so that nobody is overwhelmed.

**Carrie**: Yes!

**Susan**: I think that's the fastest way for everybody to lose the motivation to really use it. And we don't do it syntactically correct initially. For one thing, that's not where our kids are and that would just be way too much time and you'd never get anything done. So, pick out key words. We talk about using core words, the high frequency words that we use all the time. If you're AAC user is at the one word utterance stage, then model one and two word phrases. If he or she is at the two-word stage, then model two and three word phrases. So, you're going to build up to that gradually. Initially we want to get some communication going. We want to get some functions in there and some frustration reduced. We can pull the syntax in later as the language develops. But we want to keep it simple to start so there is some success.

**Carrie**: Wonderful. Yeah that's right along with the same recommendations we have for if you are talking to a child who's at the one word level. You should be talking to them in one and two word utterances. So, it goes right along with the natural progression that we've all been using for language development and language therapy. It's just you are using a different mode. You are using the device instead of your voice. Or well in addition to your voice.

**Susan**: Exactly. I tell speech pathologists all the time, you don't need to do anything different for your kid with AAC. They are just using a different mode to respond. But all the same kinds of language tasks and building language activities that you do are exactly the same for your AAC user.

**Carrie**: Absolutely. Alright so if you are just joining us, we are talking about AAC implementation strategies today. We have shared how to use aided simulation or modeling to show the child how to use the device. And Susan you touched a little bit on core words, that's our next tip is to focus on the core words, as opposed to every picture or word on the system. So, talk to us about core words. What are those and how are they used.

**Susan**: Ok, core words are the high frequency words in our language. And if you are a teacher and say if you are familiar with your site word list, core words overlap with those beginning sight words pretty much one to one with a little bit of change. But they are the words that we all use the most to build phrases. And a lot of them are multiple meaning words and we build on that so that use of just one word has multiple context in which the kid can communicate now. And there is not, again a hard and fast, here's 25 core words and you can't ever deviate from that, because different places, different cultures, different context. But in general, the average toddler, although he knows a lot of words, only uses 25 of them for 96% of what is said. And so, if we can start kids with just those first 25 words, building them up gradually, we can give them a lot of opportunity to communicate. When you start putting those words together into two word phrases, you've got a lot of power. The really important thing to remember about core words is that not one of them is a noun. We start out teaching kids with disabilities, nouns so they can ask for their favorite thing, so they can get their favorite toy or snack. But requesting doesn't get you very far with interacting with people. You say I want something, they give it to you, and we're done talking. Now what do we do. So, when we want to teach language, we want to move into some of those other words. So, for example GO is a core word. And I can teach a child GO and have him say 'go away and leave me alone'. Or 'go' I want to go someplace. Or turn it on I want to make it go. And so now he has with just one word, three or four situations in which he can use that one word. Whereas if I teach him skittles, there's nowhere for him to go with that other than asking for skittles. And you know if he says skittles, I might assume that he wants skittles, but if he doesn't have a way to say, no more skittles, or I hate skittles, or somebody stole my skills, he really can't communicate very much at all. So, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, those are the big core words. And if we start out just picking out those core words in activities and again build those up gradually, there's the same developmental progression that your typical kids go through in building their language and vocabulary. So, we want to make sure that we are giving them their own opportunities to construct their own messages and to say whatever they want.

**Carrie**: Perfect. Yes, I love that you gave the example of GO because that is one that I always start with, with my students. And our children really like movement activities so they can as GO to get all kinds of different movement and sensory input. Which usually is pretty motivating for them, so that's a good example.

**Susan**: Yep and most of the kids I work with that go away and leave me alone is a really big one. Make sure that's right on the first page.

**Carrie**: Absolutely, absolutely! Alright if you are joining with us live, stick around. We are going to be doing some giveaways here in just a minute. We are talking about AAC today and our next tip for talking about AAC would be to plan your ALGS. Tell us about ALGS Susan.

**Susan**: Ok so that's the aided language stimulation that I talked about first. That aided input where you're using pictures to demonstrate model for the child where the words are, what they mean, how to find them. And so again when I started talking about starting with that one activity at a time so you don't get overwhelmed. It's really helpful when you are just starting out with implementation. Do a little planning and think about it ahead of time. For example, one activity that I use a lot is bubbles. Not matter the age of the kids, bubbles are a big hit, which is fine because I love them too. And so, I would think about the key core words that I'm going to use when I am playing with bubbles for a student. So, things like blow and more and pop and catch. Or big and little.

**Carrie**: Open

**Susan**: Right. Those are the core words that you want to think about using and demonstrating in that interaction. So that I can sit there and I can say, blow more, blow again, want more, want bubbles, want catch, oh you popped. Any of those one and two words. Longer if I've got somebody who can move on beyond that. But just by thinking about what those words are ahead of time if I am not familiar with this process. Suddenly struggling in an activity and wondering what's the word I want to use and where do I find it.

**Carrie**: Yeah

**Susan**: And some of that is good in if it's helpful for the student to see you go through the process of "oh ok I wanted to say bubbles". So, for that I am going to go to my activities page and then I'm going to go to my toys page and then if I hit bubbles, it should take me to a page with bubbles, where I have those keywords for that activity. So, planning it out, writing it down is really helpful for when you are first starting out.

**Carrie**: Absolutely. I like to be able to kind of play with the device or the pictures ahead of time so like you said, I know where everything is. But it's also really important like you were saying to be able to show the child how you got there. If you just take their device and pop over to the bubbles page and set it down in front of them, they have no idea how to get to the bubbles page themselves. So very important to be able to walk them through that and show them exactly what you want them to be able to do.

**Susan**: And sometimes having the system on paper is really, really helpful too. So, for example if you are a PODD book user. And PODD is pragmatically organized dynamic display books. And there are very systematic ways that you go from one page to the next in that system. And by having it on paper the student can see oh I’m talking about a place, I'm going to turn to the places page. That's the green pages and that's how I'm going to find this place. So, it's not so mysterious. Because a lot of times when we are first starting out, a lot of our kids are a little impulsive and if they just start pushing buttons, yes, it's great for them to explore, but it's not great for them to get stuck on a page and they have no idea how they got there and they can't get back and now the room has a missile flying through it. So, we want to make sure that we give kids the opportunity how to find what I want to find.

**Carrie**: Absolutely, I love it. Ok so we've talked about aided simulation and planning that out ahead of time. We've also talked about using some core words when you are teaching the device and starting with those high frequency core words. Now we are going to talk about ascribing meaning to actions. Talk about how that looks Susan in your sessions.

**Susan**: So often times when we have a very beginning communicator who is just learning to use AAC and is particularly for kids with some motor difficulties, so access might me a little bit of an issue, and they need just some scaffolding to just get started. One of the things that we talk about doing is ascribing meaning to a gesture. Or a word of proximation or a movement of some sort. So that you can say, 'oh I think that you are trying to tell me that you are angry'. And then through the process of repetition and the multiple opportunities that you use that over and over and over again, the child says 'oh when I do this, she knows that I am angry about something'. And even if the child isn't sort of metacognitively thinking about that, they figure out the cause and effect. I do this and that's what it means, and that's how I get what I want. So, when we are starting out with somebody who is just brand new and is not communicating at all and we are not really sure about what they are thinking or what they are doing, it helps to ascribe. This gesture I'm going to think that you say yes. Again, repetition. They say that your AAC user needs two hundred opportunities every day to learn to use their AAC system. It sounds like a lot, but it's not really when you think about the whole day long, all the things you say to your students. And so that's another way to give them opportunities how to communicate what they want.

**Carrie**: So when you are saying you're ascribing meaning, for example you are angry, you are showing them that on their device right? You are using their AAC?

**Susan**: Yes

**Carrie**: Perfect.

**Susan**: If you look like you're upset, we go to the feelings page. Upset might go to a page of things that might upset you or might make you feel this way. Are you tired. Was somebody mean to you and you can go through those and point to them. Use auditory or verbal scanning through them and say, ok let's see if we can figure out what you are upset about.

**Carrie**: Or even do you need a break. If you can find a button that says break and you know that they're just kind of getting over stimulated and you can use that to model as well.

**Susan**: Absolutely.

**Carrie**: Perfect. Ok so the last tip we have today, and then we will do some giveaways here on Facebook Live. The last tip we have today is to focus on a variety of communicative functions. Talk to us about that.

**Susan**: Ok so as I eluded to earlier, one of the things that we start out with is teaching kids the names of their favorite activities and objects. Some of us walked around for years with M&M's in our pockets and goldfish crackers in the other pocket. And the problem with that is yes it solves an immediate problem. If you have a kid who is frustrated and tantruming because they can't have their favorite teddy bear, graham crackers, its ok to teach them the picture for those things and how to ask for those things. But again, making a request is something of a dead end in terms of interaction and engagement. What we really want to teach kids is how to communicate. And there are so many other functions that we use. We don't just ask for objects, we ask for escape or help. Or we say hello and goodbye. Or we make comments about this is good or this isn't good. We describe things. All of those other language functions that as speech pathologists, we work on with kids all of the time. And we want these kids to have the words for that as well. We want to have them be able to say 'this is really funny I want to do it again, or read it again'. I like this, I don't like this. All of those other functions, particularly that they can use to interact with another person. Asking questions, answering questions. So, we want to move beyond just answering and again give kids all of the words that they need for all of the things they might want to say. And things like, I'm not happy and I'm frustrated and I don't like this and I want to do something different. You know all of those are really, really important comments to teach kids, and we often forget about those. In spite of the fact that we're running behavior programs. We don't always put the words in the AAC system. So, we want to make sure that we get them beyond just, 'I want some M&M's'.

**Carrie**: Definitely. I do see that the requesting is the low hanging fruit of communicative functions. You know it's very easy to work on. It's very motivating for the children. But you know once you are trying to actually get them to use that device functionally you really do have to work on some of those other communicative functions like commenting or negation. So, like you were saying, if he wants no skittles, he can tell you that negation. There's all kinds of different uses that we have to be focusing on as well. Not just requesting.

**Susan**: Yeah and you know again, frequently our kids are given words for the things that they want, but no way to say what they don't want. Or no way to tell you that Johnny is annoying me so I'm just going to smack him. Because I don't have any other way to communicate that.

**Carrie**: Hahahaha, yep!

**Susan**: But we really want to make sure that we have all of the words for all of the things that those kids want to say. And we know particularly with those kids with autism, a lot of what they want to say is go away and leave me alone. Or that's bothering me or it's too loud in here. And I need a break, go away. So, we really want to make sure that we give kids all of the functions for communicating because there are so many other purposes and we don't want them to miss out on those.

**Carrie**: Absolutely. Ok so those are our 5 tips today for working on AAC. If you are on here with us live, stay tuned, we are doing giveaways right now. Susan is going to share her favorite resource and then we will do a giveaway for her favorite resources from her   
Teachers Pay Teachers store. So, let's start with your favorite resource. You were talking about some handouts that are free in your store, can you tell us about those?

**Susan**: Well there are a couple of places that I tend to send people for some good information and handouts. In my [Teachers Pay Teachers store](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Susan-Berkowitz) I have a handful of free handouts that are really useful that people tend to like. One of them is exactly a planning form like I talked about planning out aided language stimulation in a given activity. So, there is actually a little template and some suggestions on how to fill it out and some examples for people. And again, the form they can use when they are first starting out and planning. That's free along with some other handouts about how to be a good communication partner. What things to do. A little bit about aided language stimulation of core words. So, if you go to the [freebie section of my store](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Susan-Berkowitz/Price-Range/Free), there are half a dozen handouts that are free about using aided language stimulation.

**Carrie**: Great.

**Susan**: I also do a lot of blogging about AAC on my blog. And my other favorite place to send people is The Practical AAC blog which is [praacticalaac.org](http://praacticalaac.org/). And Carole Zangari has a ton of information. You can get lost for a week on that site.

**Carrie**: Yep absolutely. Ok so your Teachers Pay Teachers store is, it called Susan Berkowitz?

**Susan**: It is.

**Carrie**: Ok so go to [teacherspayteachers.com](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/) and look for Susan Berkowitz. Or what's your blog site?

**Susan**: Ok it's [kidzlearnlanguage.blogspot.com](http://kidzlearnlanguage.blogspot.com/).

**Carrie**: Ok. And I will put the links to all of that in the show notes over on the [Speech and Language Kids website](https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/) as soon as we have those up. And hopefully try to get those into the comments here on Facebook. And now we're going to do a giveaway. So, if you are on Facebook Live with us, stay right there. So, for a giveaway today we are going to do two giveaways. The first giveaway is going to be Susan's six core words book. Can you tell us a little bit about what's included in your core word books?

**Susan**: I'm sorry Carrie, I didn't hear that.

**Carrie**: Oops, we're going to talk about the giveaway. Can you talk about your six core words books?

**Susan**: Ok so I have some sets of books, interactive books, for teaching core words. And it's just an added example. You know we always want to teach words that are in context, but we also know that our kids need lots more opportunities for that. So, I have some sets of interactive books. It's one book per core word and I have them in sets of six. So, my first one, six core words for teaching AAC users, is a big seller. And as I said there is one interactive book for each word with a dozen or more pages for opportunities for kids to put the symbol where it belongs, learn the symbol and the context that goes with it.

**Carrie**: Perfect. Ok so the first person to answer my question here on Facebook Live is going to win that. The second person to answer my question is going to win two free months in my membership, [The Speech Therapy Solution](https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/become-a-member/). If you are not familiar with that, that is my exclusive membership just for speech language pathologists. And that will give you access to the training materials. We have training videos. We have webinars that we do once a month. There are resources, handouts, printable that you can use in therapy. All kinds of good stuff. So, you can check that out if you go to [speechandlanguagekids.com/join](https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/become-a-member/). So, here's the giveaway. I'm going to ask a question. The first two people to answer are going to win. Here's the question. Name a communicative function. So, the first two people to type in a communicative function in the comments are going to win. First one will win the core words books. Those are interactive books to help the child learn how to use those core words. And the second person is going to win the two free months in my membership. Alright, ok so Jesse Mancuso says commenting. That is a communicative function and Jesse you won the core word books. How would you like her to contact you Susan?

**Susan**: You can email me at languagelearningapps@gmail.com.

**Carrie**: Perfect. Alright and Heather Kelly McCay says commenting. So, you win the two free months in my membership. And I can't remember, you may already be in the membership. If that's the case we are just going to add two months on to it so you are not going to pay for the next two months. You can email me over at Carrie@speechandlanguagekids.com and my assistant, Kena, will get you hooked up with those two free months. Alright. Thank you everyone for joining us and Susan where can people find more information about you?

**Susan**: Thank you very much Carrie.

**Carrie**: Where should people find more about you, your website, or what would be the best way?

**Susan**: My website is [susanberkowitz.net](http://www.susanberkowitz.net/) and so there's information about me and a link to my blog and a link to my iTunes pages for my two apps.

**Carrie**: Perfect, wonderful. Alright and let's see, Ashley Warren says 'did my comment go through?'. Ashley, that's the first one I've had for you, so I don't think it went through, sorry. Alright if you guys would like more information about how you can get help with your tough speech language cases, head on over to [speechandlanguagekids.com/join](https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/become-a-member/) and get all the information about the speech therapy solution. Alright thank you all for joining us and catch us not this coming Monday, but the following Monday, we'll be doing our next show. Thanks so much and have a great day, bye everyone.

Thank you for joining us today on The Speech Show. We hope today’s tips have helped you feel a little less stressed and a little more confident about your work. If you’re looking for more stress busters and confidence boosters, we’d love to have you join us in The Speech Therapy Solution, where you’ll get access to a huge library of premium training videos and another library of print and go therapy materials. You can also get help with your tough cases by Carrie on the weekly Q&A calls, or by posting in the exclusive Facebook group. Plus, group members can join us for a monthly webinar that can be used for a continuing education credit. Head on over to SpeechandLanguageKids.com/join to check out all the amazing benefits of the speech therapy solution membership. Bye for now.