

# AAC for Transition Planning

Supporting all students to make  
decisions for the future

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Special education lead for AssistiveWare.

Emergent literacy consultant, focusing on students with severe disabilities and complex communication needs.

Mom to Maggie, age 16.



# This session is packed with tools and strategies to help our students:

First half

**discover more about our students as unique individuals**

Second half

**validate what we learn,  
support them to participate more deeply in their planning,  
expand their choice and control.**

## Some terms you'll hear in this session

**Conventional:** can communicate with symbols with anyone who speaks their language

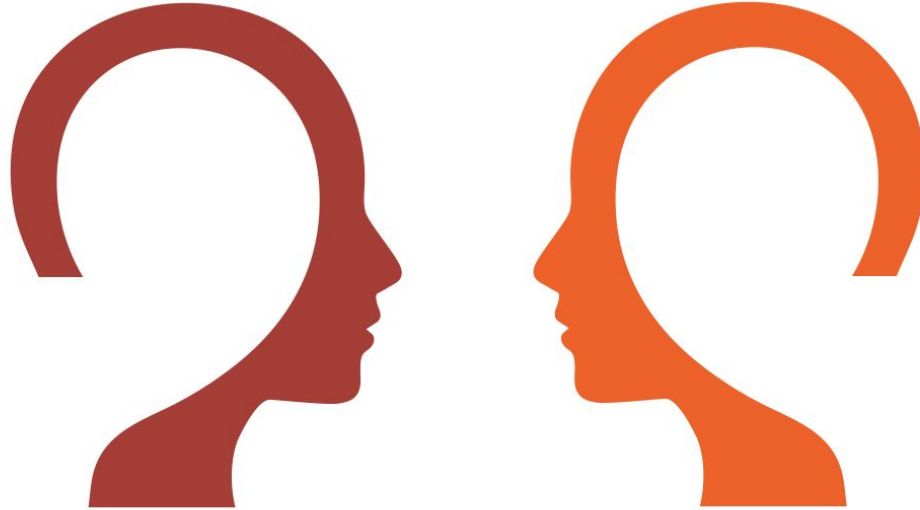
**Early conventional:** can communicate with symbols with familiar partners

**Emergent:** is learning and exploring how to express ideas with symbols, inconsistently and often without accuracy

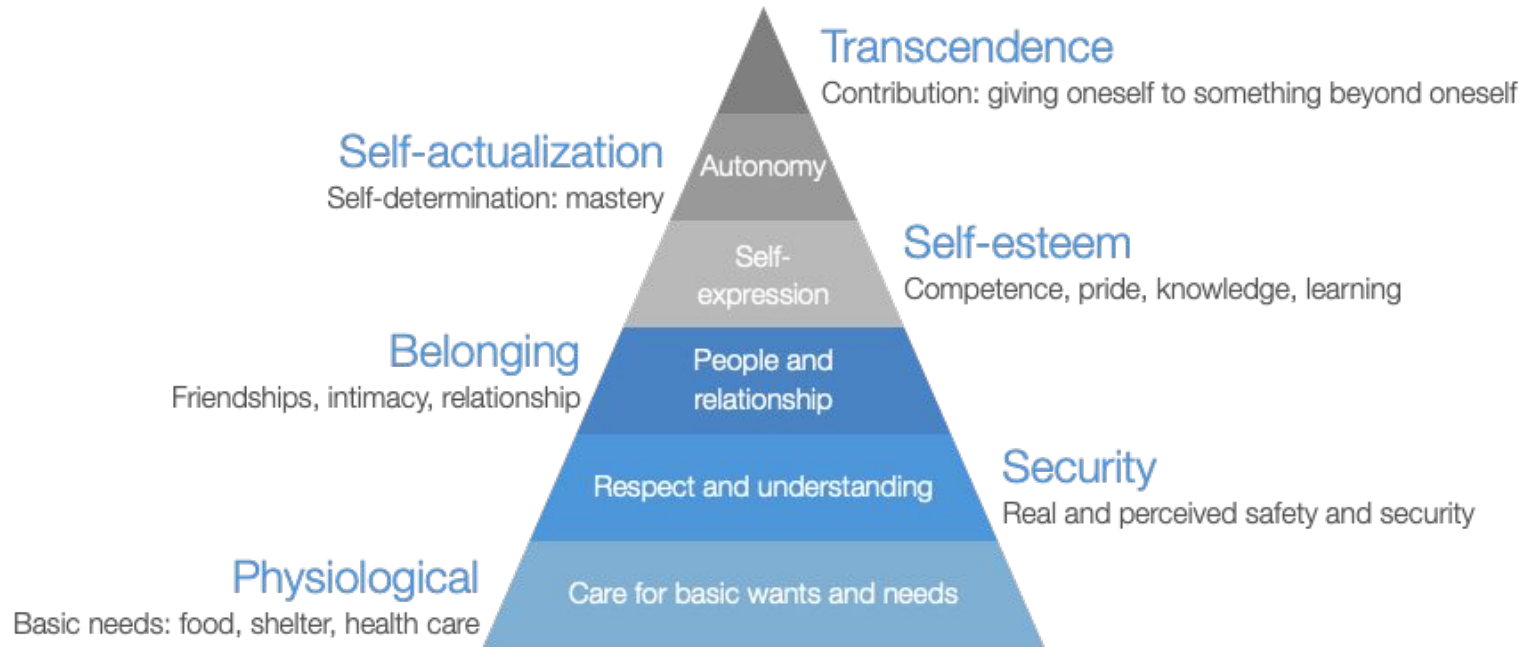
**Early emergent:** is learning and observing that symbols and AAC carry meaning and can express ideas

**Robust AAC:** a system that contains a large number of symbols that can be flexibly combined to express a wide range of communication functions

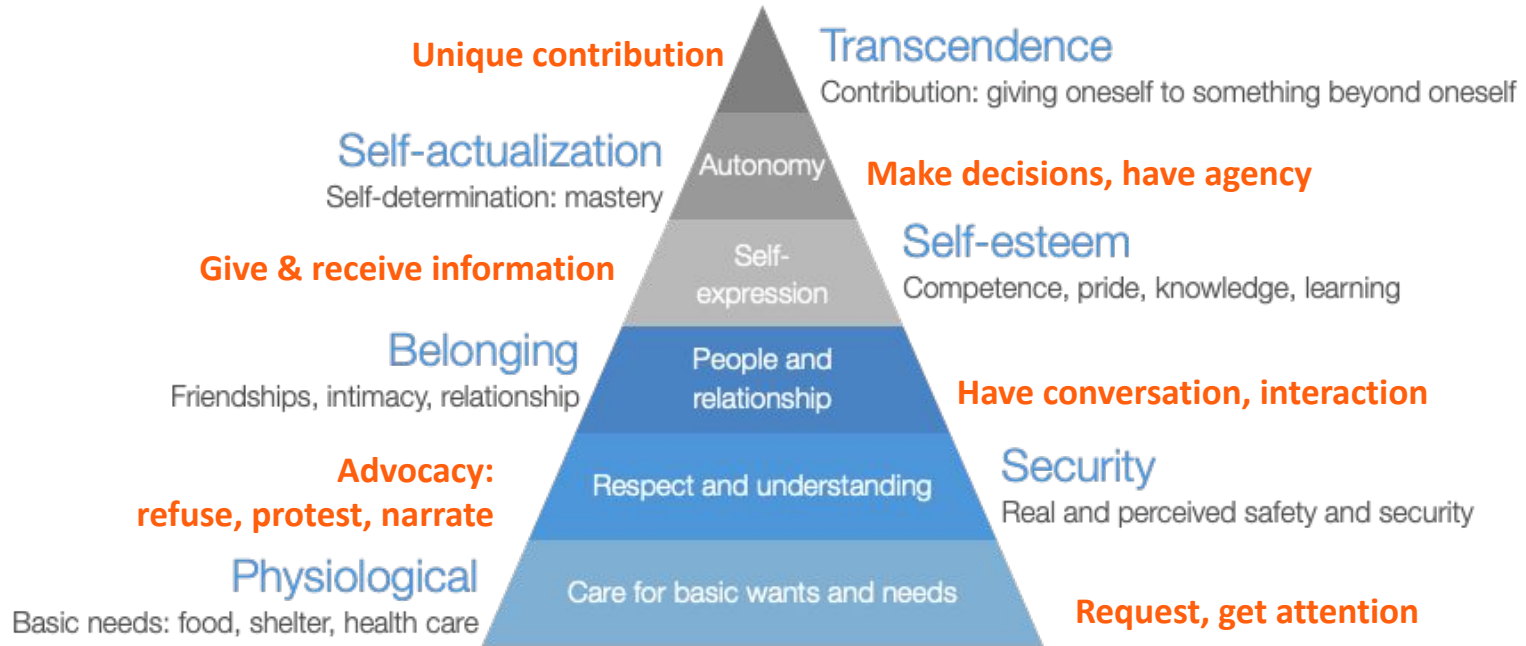
**What is the ultimate outcome we want for our students and their communication?**



# Meet all of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

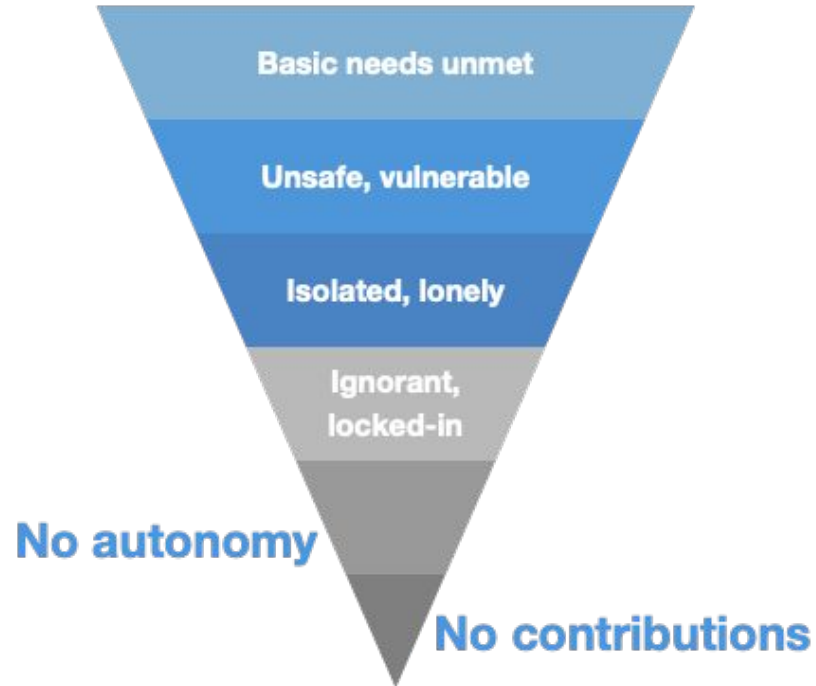


# Maslow's Hierarchy & communication functions



# What are the outcomes we don't want for our students?

# The reverse of Maslow's Hierarchy



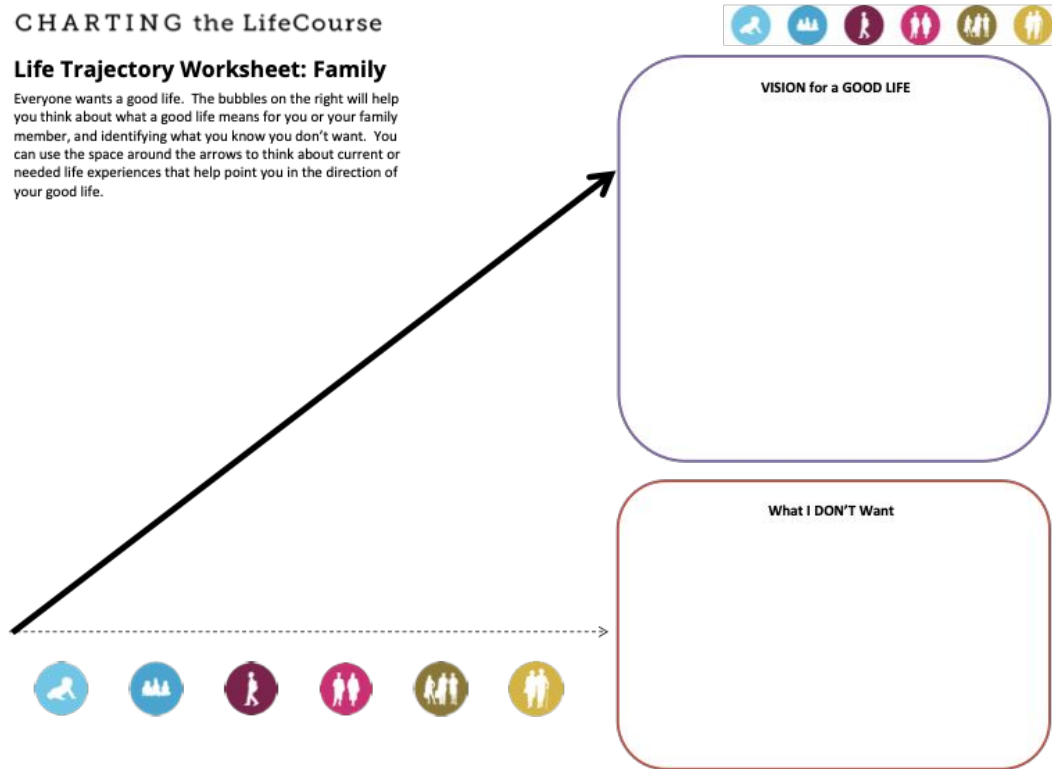
**How can we plan for these best communication outcomes, & safeguard against the negative ones?**

# Plan for communication over the LifeCourse

## CHARTING the LifeCourse

### Life Trajectory Worksheet: Family

Everyone wants a good life. The bubbles on the right will help you think about what a good life means for you or your family member, and identifying what you know you don't want. You can use the space around the arrows to think about current or needed life experiences that help point you in the direction of your good life.



The diagram illustrates a life trajectory worksheet. It features a large black arrow pointing from the bottom-left towards the top-right. At the top of the arrow, there is a horizontal row of six circular icons: a person with a cane, a family of three, a person with a cane, a family of two, a family of three, and a family of two. At the bottom of the arrow, there is another horizontal row of six circular icons: a person with a cane, a family of three, a person with a cane, a family of two, a family of three, and a family of two. To the right of the arrow, there are two large, rounded rectangular boxes. The top box is labeled "VISION for a GOOD LIFE" and the bottom box is labeled "What I DON'T Want".

# Plan for communication over the LifeCourse

## Life Stages and Life Domains



### Meaningful Day & Employment:

What you do as part of everyday life– school, employment, volunteering, communication, routines, life skills.



### Community Living

Where and how you live– housing and living options, community access, transportation, home modifications.



### Safety & Security

Staying safe and secure– emergencies, well-being, guardianship options, legal rights and issues.



### Healthy Living

Managing and accessing health care and staying well– medical, mental health, behavior, developmental, wellness and nutrition.



### Social & Spirituality

Building friendships and relationships, leisure activities, personal networks, faith community.



### Citizenship & Advocacy

Building valued roles, making choices, setting goals, assuming responsibility and driving how one's own life is lived.

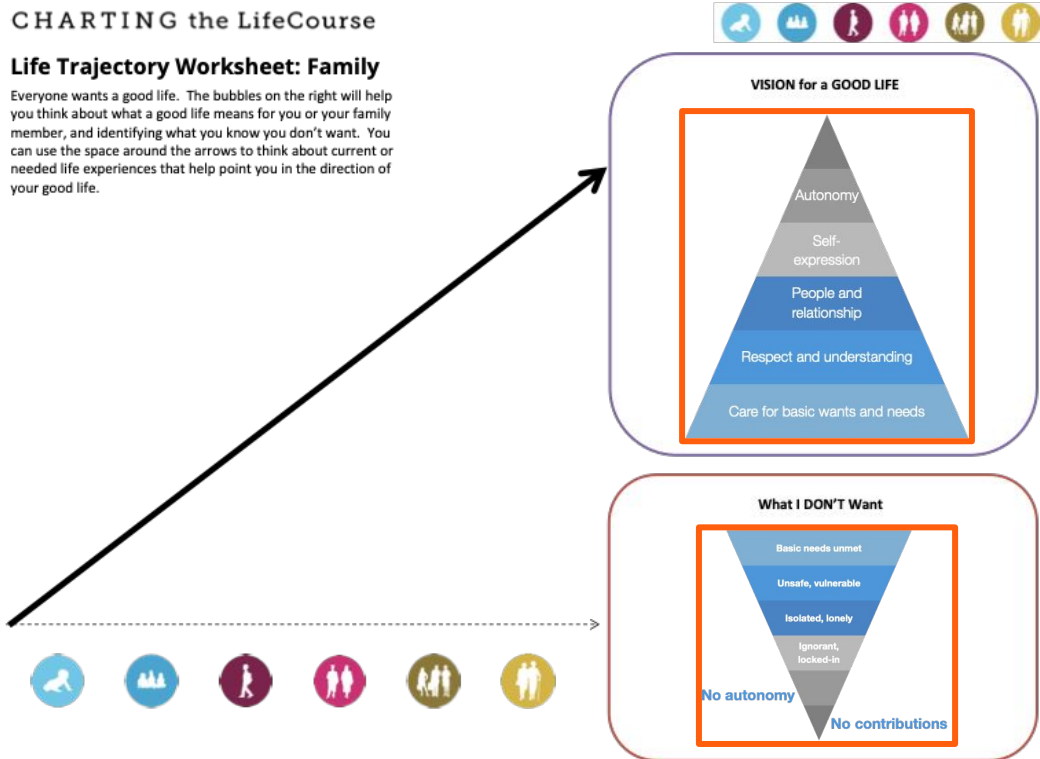


# Plan for communication over the LifeCourse

## CHARTING the LifeCourse

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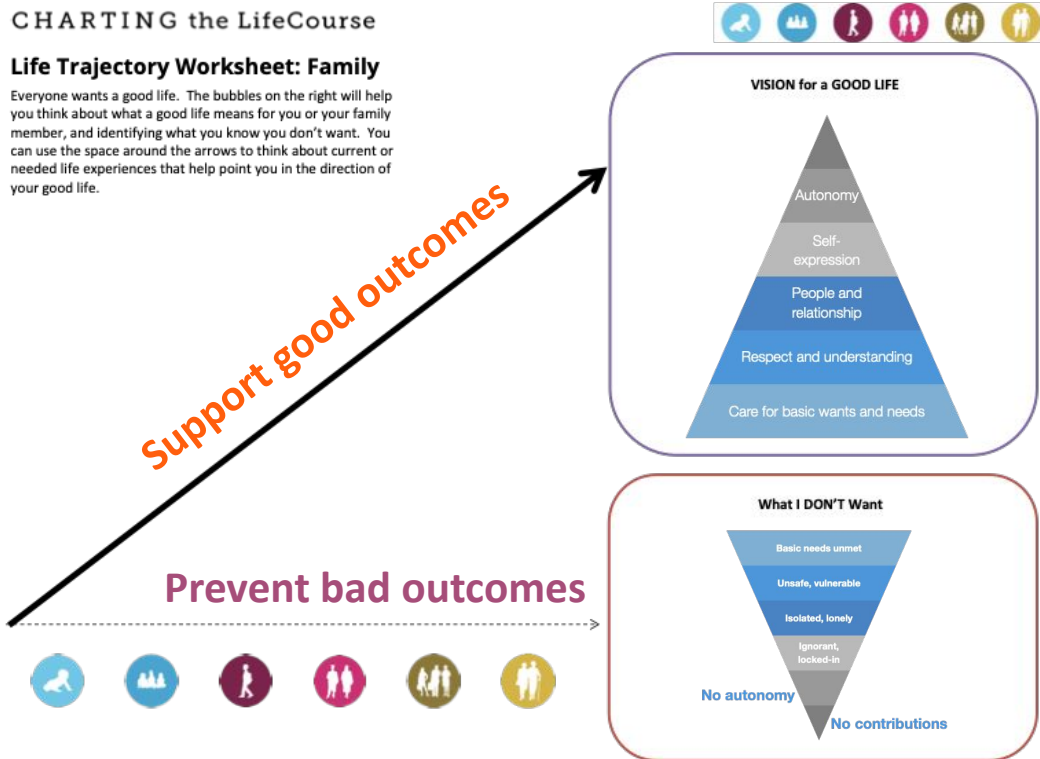


# The role of services (e.g. public education, special education, speech therapy)

## CHARTING the LifeCourse

### Life Trajectory Worksheet: Family

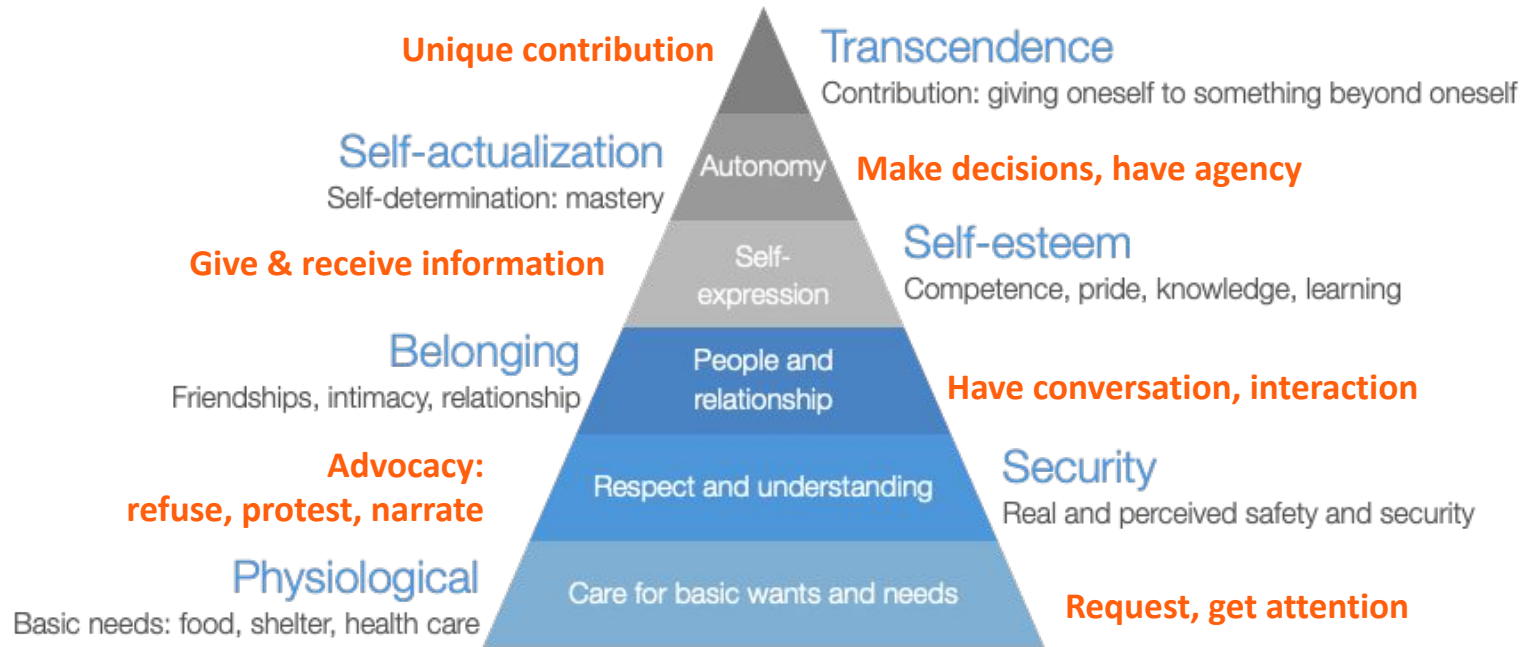
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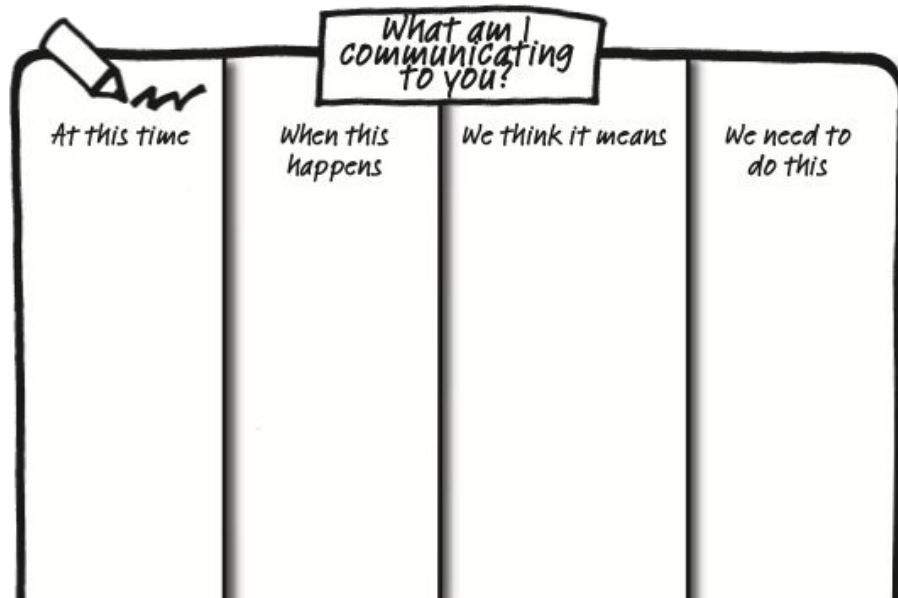
# Planning for communication over the lifecourse requires us to make a shift:

From “functional communication”  
to the functions of communication

# What does the student and family imagine?



## Record how the student communicates: Communication chart (e.g., gesture dictionary)



A hand-drawn communication chart template. At the top center is a box containing the question "What am I communicating to you?". Below this box are four vertical columns. The first column is labeled "At this time" and has a pencil icon at the top left. The second column is labeled "When this happens". The third column is labeled "We think it means". The fourth column is labeled "We need to do this".

What am I communicating to you?			
At this time	When this happens	We think it means	We need to do this

<b>When this is happening:</b>	<b>And Maggie does this:</b>	<b>We think it means:</b>	<b>And you should:</b>
Any classroom activity	Makes a happy sucking sound through her teeth	She is thoroughly engaged in what is happening.	Video record whatever is happening. Model AAC afterwards if she seems irritated by it in the moment.
At the start of class	Hovers on the threshold, refuses to enter	She is stressed by the physical environment	Dim the lights, wait for the room to quiet. Use PAS of her Something's Wrong folder to identify the issue.
Anytime	Flicks her fingers repeatedly across her lips	She has questions that are causing anxiety	Use PAS of her Questions folder in her AAC.
Anytime	Whacks the back of her hand repeatedly under her chin	She is deeply anxious and is on the verge of a meltdown	Reassure her in a very calm voice that she is safe, everything is OK, and where her people are.

# More formal:

## The Pragmatics Profile for People who use AAC

### Appendix 1: Methods of communication chart

\*FO = Understood by familiar only  
All = Understood by all

		Uses AAC resource: single words	Uses AAC resource: sentence or phrase	Eye pointing, eye contact		Body movement		Vocalisation, sound, word or word approximation		Sign		Gesture		Facial expression		Other
				FO*	ALL	FO	ALL	FO	ALL	FO	ALL	FO	ALL			
<b>1</b>	<b>Context and motivation</b>															
1.1	Shows likes															
1.2	Shows dislikes															
<b>2</b>	<b>Gaining attention</b>															
2.1	Interest in interaction															
2.4	Gaining attention to prepare for an interaction															
<b>3</b>	<b>Drawing attention</b>															
3.1	... to self															
3.2	... to an event or action															
3.3	... to an object															
3.4	... to other people															
<b>4</b>	<b>Requesting</b>															
4.1	... a person															
4.2	... recurrence															
4.3	... cessation															
4.4	... assistance															
4.5	... an object															
4.6	Response to direct request for action															
4.7	... an event or action															
4.8	... information															
4.9	Responding to a request for information															
4.10	... confirmation of information															

## REASONS we communicate

Use this poster to plan communication goals and activities for AAC users.

Which of these communication functions is your AAC user already using? Which do you want to teach next? And what words and messages can you model to teach these different reasons to communicate?



Learn more about communication functions or download this poster: [www.assistiveware.com/communicationfunctions](http://www.assistiveware.com/communicationfunctions)

### Plan for different communication functions

Communication Function	Core words to model	Core words with fringe to model
<b>Request</b>	want, want that, want different, want more, I want	Want play I want to watch TV
<b>Protest</b>	not, not that, stop	Not red Stop that music
<b>Comment</b>	look, look that, see, see them	I see car That girl looks pretty
<b>Direct</b>	get, get it, give me, put in, put it in, give me that	Do more swinging Give me my cup please



### Social Interaction

- Greet
- Be polite
- Flirt or compliment
- Start a conversation
- Set topic
- Direct a conversation
- Change topic
- Ask social questions
- Share about self
- Wrap up a conversation
- Tease or joke
- Negotiate

### Getting and giving information

- Comment
- Direct
- Express feelings
- Ask questions
- Discuss
- Give opinions
- Describe
- Share news
- Tell a story
- Tell an imaginary story
- Plan
- Explain



### Strategies to be better understood



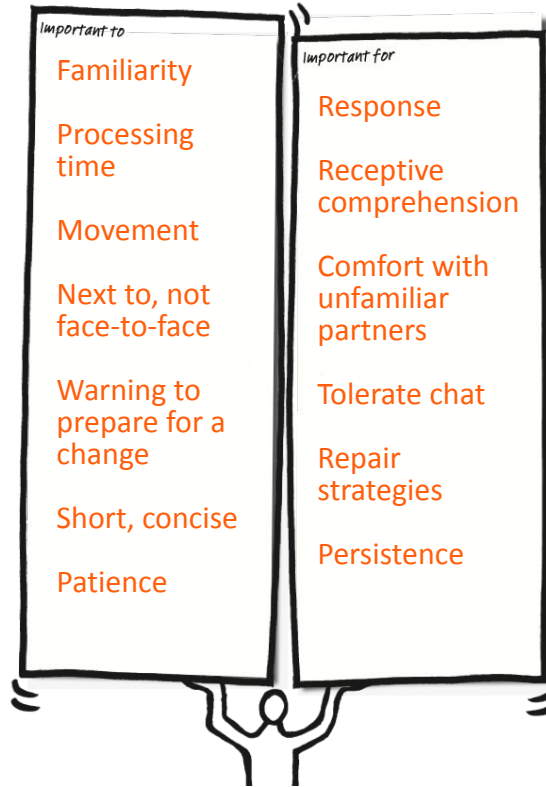
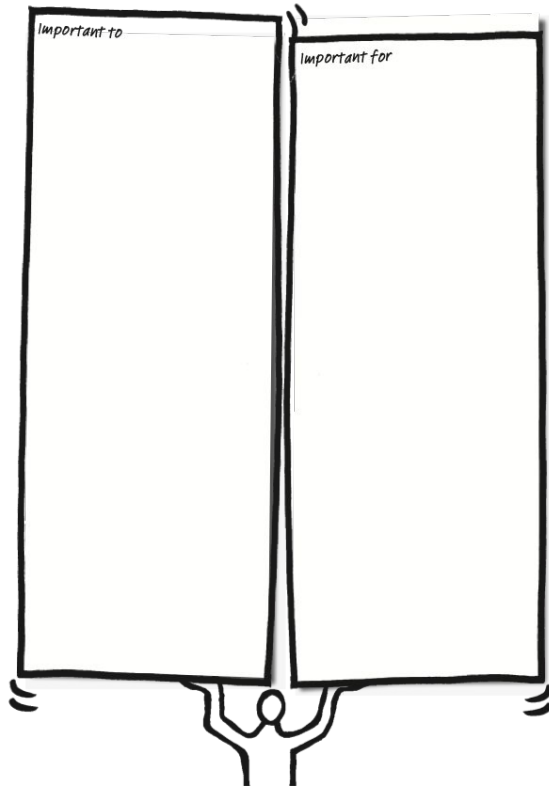
- Clarify
- Ask to clarify
- Say it differently
- Give a clue
- Describe
- Use the alphabet

### Expressing Needs and Wants

- Make choices
- Get attention
- Request
- Refuse
- Protest









# Record what is important to this student



# Brainstorm what is happening and working

Perfect Week

	Mornings 	Afternoons  	Evening
Mon			
Tues			
Wed			
Thurs			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

 What's working?	 What's not working?
	the person
	family
	staff
 What needs to happen next to build on what's working and change what's not working?	

# How do we know what to prioritize?

The most **important** communication needs that are currently **unmet**.

## Important, working

## Not important now, working

Share likes      Share dislikes      Protesting

Getting your attention      Requesting      Rejecting

Sharing my opinion      Refusing      Setting the topic

Negotiating      Giving partner feedback

Commenting      Maintaining an interaction

Asking questions      Directing your attention

Changing the topic      Sharing information

Social interaction      Repairing misunderstanding

Polite talk/etiquette

Chat/small talk

## Important, not working

## Not important now, not working

## What about other AAC competencies?

What other competency needs are being met, and which ones are unmet?

## Important TO

Share dislikes  
Getting your attention  
Sharing my opinion  
Rejecting  
Refusing  
Protesting  
Negotiating  
Requesting  
Asking questions  
Sharing likes  
Repairing misunderstanding  
Social interaction  
Directing another's attention  
Commenting  
Maintaining an interaction  
Setting the topic  
Changing the topic

Social-emotional:  
**expressing feelings**  
**self-regulation**  
**self-efficacy**

Linguistic:  
**receptive vocabulary**  
**expressive vocabulary**

## Important FOR

Chat/small talk  
Polite talk/etiquette  
Giving partner feedback  
Sharing information

Operational demands of her AAC:  
**partner-assisted**  
Operational demands of her AAC:  
**Independent**  
Linguistic: **grammar**

## Important TO

Share dislikes  
Getting your attention  
Sharing my opinion  
Rejecting  
Refusing  
Protesting  
Negotiating  
Requesting  
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## Important FOR

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Operational demands of her AAC:  
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Operational demands of her AAC:  
**Independent**  
Linguistic: **grammar**

**Transition planning is about shifting the balance  
from Important FOR to Important TO**

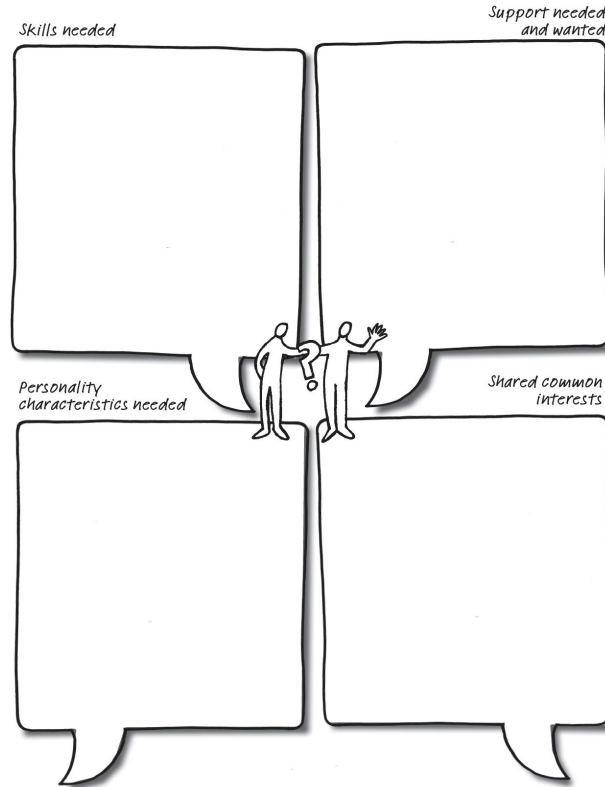
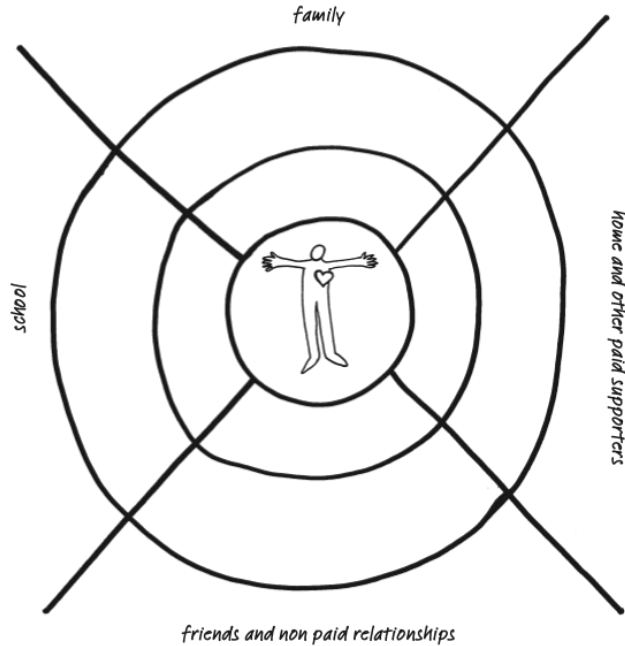
## How do we work on ALL of this?

We can't do it alone.

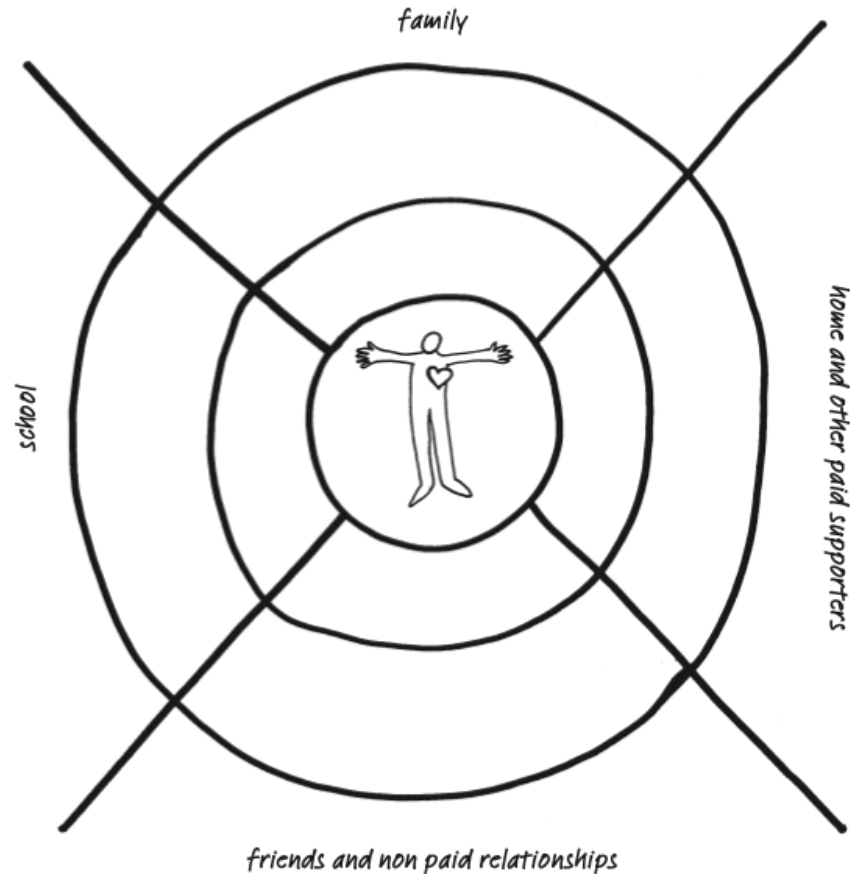
Communication across the day,  
for all possible reasons,  
with all possible communication partners.

# Tools to discover who is important, and for what

Relationship circle

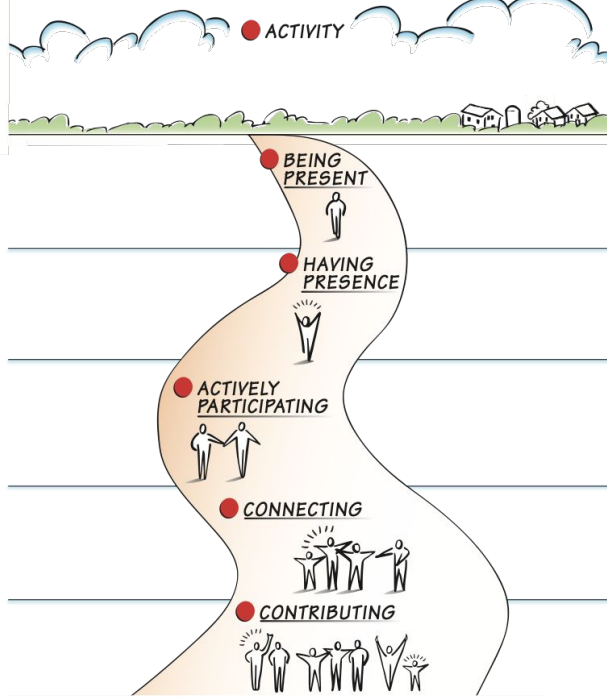


# Who are all the potential communication partners?



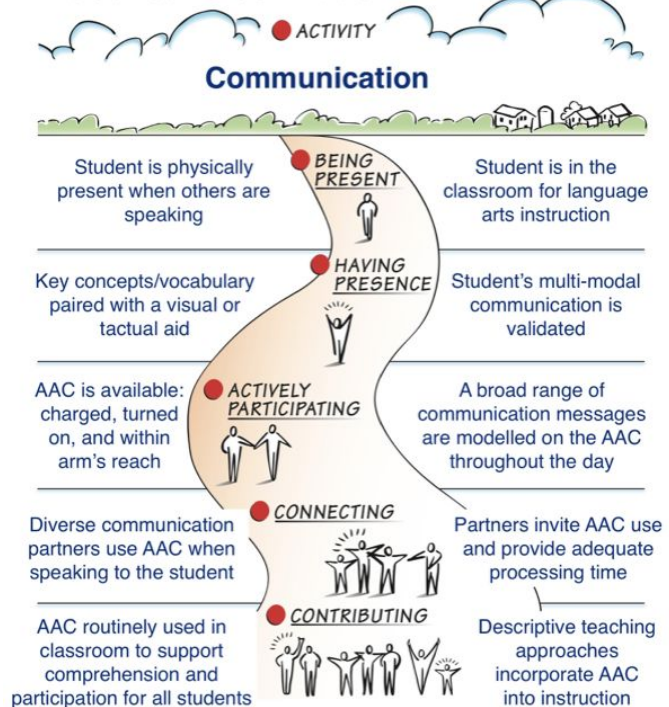
# What would it would take for contribution?

## PRESENCE TO CONTRIBUTION



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## PRESENCE TO CONTRIBUTION



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**How can we validate what we learn from communication partners?**

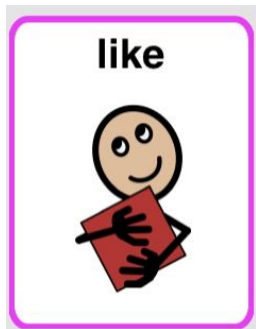
**How can we improve their participation in planning, and increase their choice and control?**

# Talking Mats

- Framework to support decision-making and discussion
- Hands-on strategies to improve communication
- Visual supports for comprehension and expression
- Physical/tactual resources to express opinions
- Shifts who is in control of the conversation
- Facilitator asks open-ended questions
- Facilitator summarizes what has been shared
- Student expresses opinions, priorities, and preferences
- **NOT** a choice-making tool

# Talking Mats Strategies

- Sit side-by-side, not face-to-face, both facing the “mat”
- Ask the student open-ended question: “How do you feel about...”
- Use a visual rating scale: like/not like, important/not, working/not, managing/not
- Use the student’s familiar AAC symbols
- Have just one topic per session
- Always provide a range of options (10–20 per mat/session)
- Use the information you collected to know what options to offer, plus have some blank options to fill out as you go
- Summarize at the end: recap and record what the student communicated
- Model if the student does not yet participate



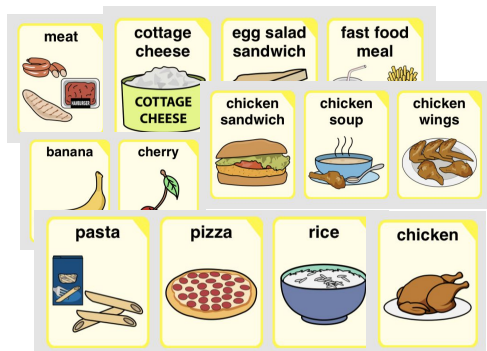
Positive

Visual rating scale

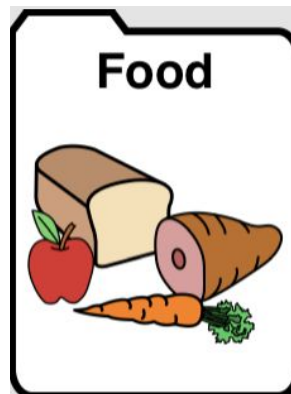
Negative

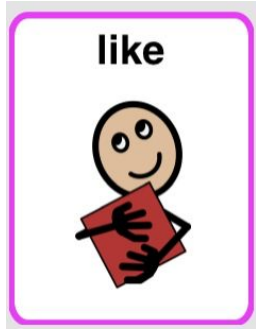


10-20 Options



Topic card





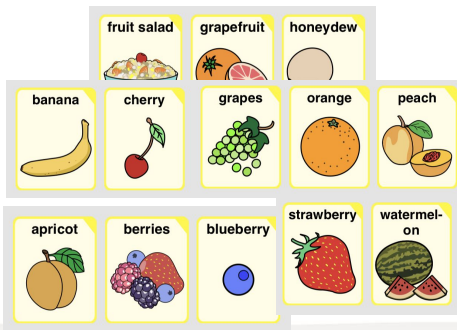
Positive

Visual rating scale

Negative

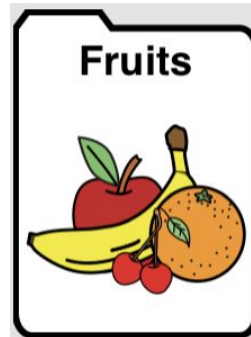


10-20 Options



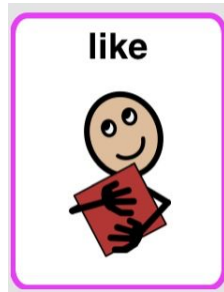
Topic card

Explore further in subsequent sessions



# Add more nuance to the rating scale

## Positive



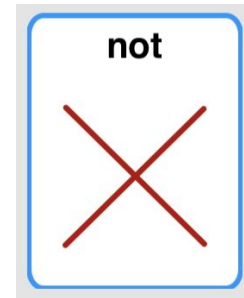
10-20 Options

## Neutral



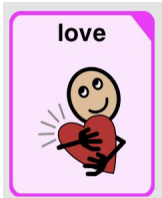
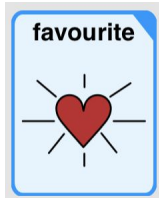
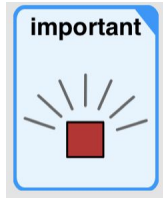
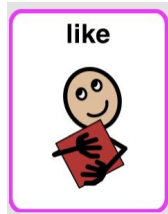
Topic card

## Negative

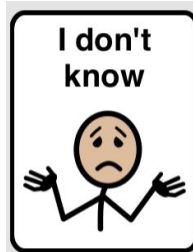


# Adapt the rating scale, but always keep the structure

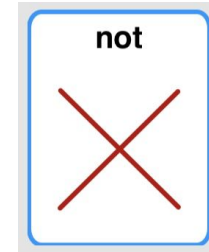
## Positive



## Neutral



## Negative



Working vs not working  
Managing vs not managing  
Happy vs unsure vs unhappy



# Add more nuance to the rating scale

## Positive

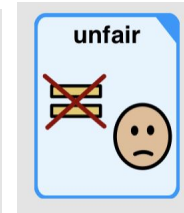
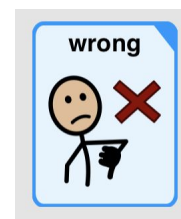
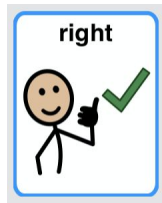
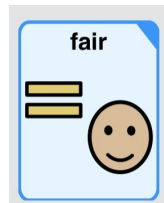
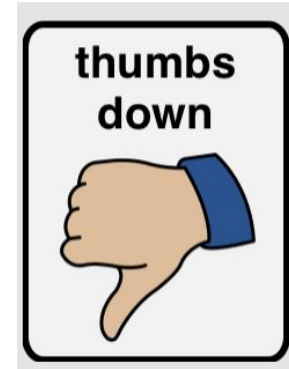


## Neutral



Topic card

## Negative



# Talking Mats

- Supports discussion and participation, but is not AAC by itself
- **NEVER** use the process as a test
- ONLY ask open-ended questions: no right or wrong answers
- Use a neutral, curious tone of voice: no pressure for any particular answer
- Have frequent, informal sessions, over long periods of time
- Teach the process with low-stakes discussions about preferences
- Build up to asking what is working/not working in essential areas
- Always summarize and confirm what the student has expressed
- **Follow up with action**

# Discuss personal interests/preferences

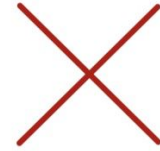
like



I don't  
know



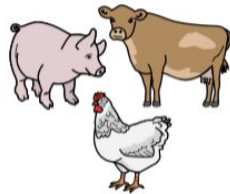
not



Food



Animals



Characters



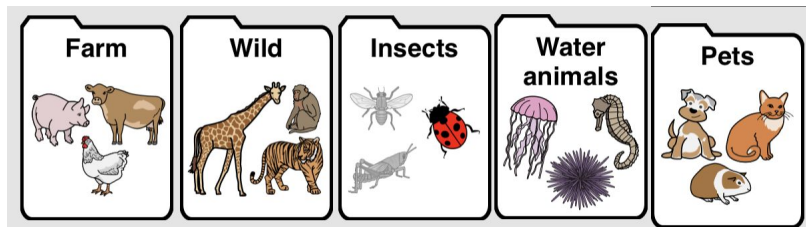
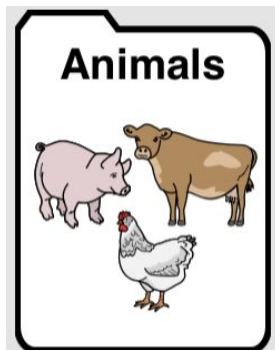
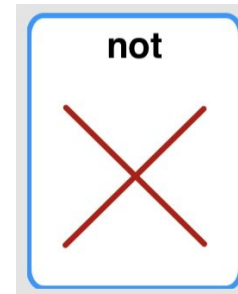
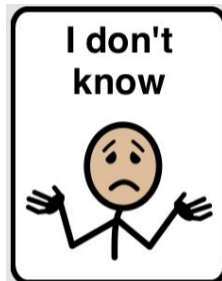
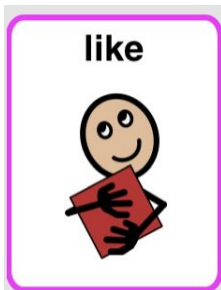
Shows



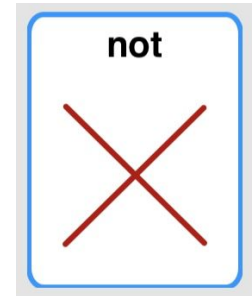
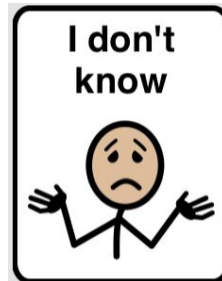
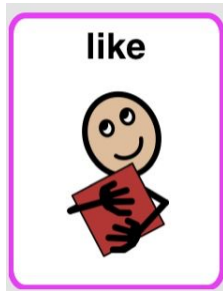
Reading



# Use follow up sessions to go deeper



**Most emergent students:  
Model for yourself, then invite the student  
Attribute meaning to what the student has expressed**



# What does the student want more of in their life?

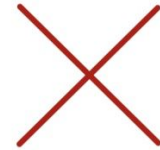
like



I don't  
know



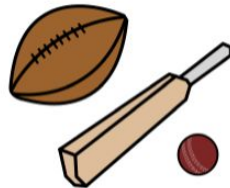
not



Authors



Sports



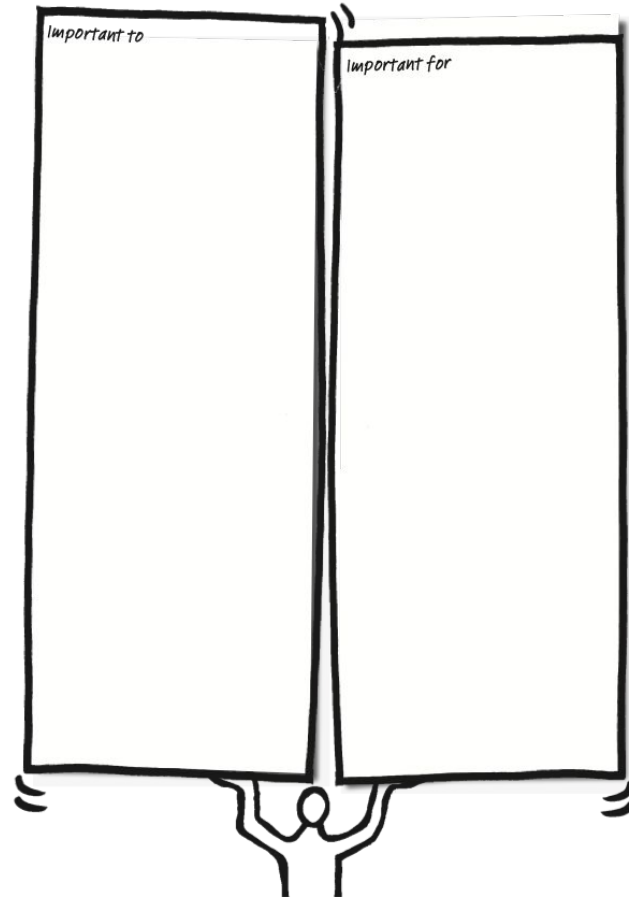
TV-Movies  
people



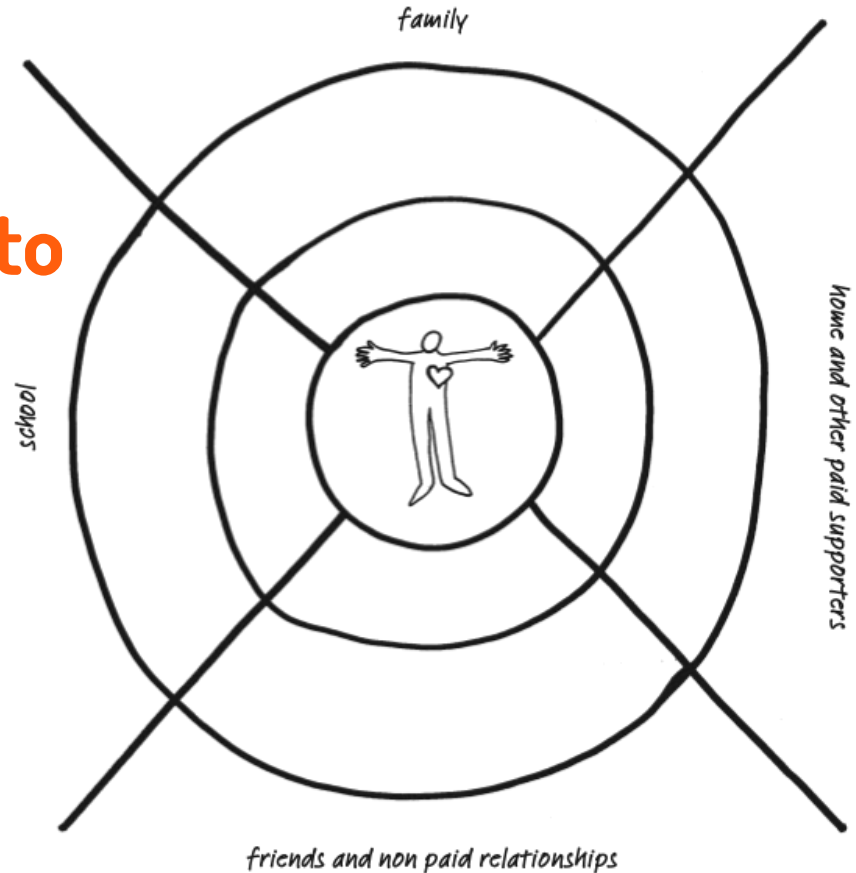
Athletes



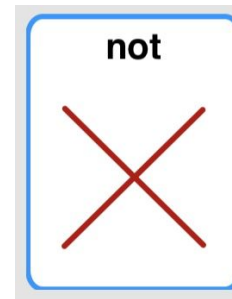
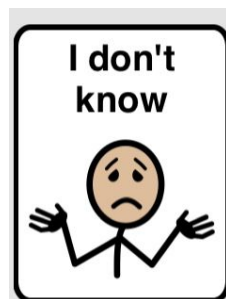
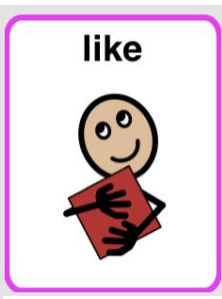
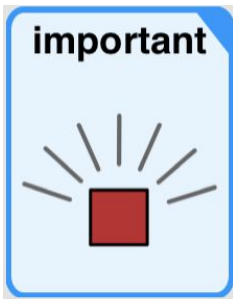
Use Talking Mats  
to verify what is  
important to the  
student



Use Talking Mats  
to verify who the  
student feels closest to



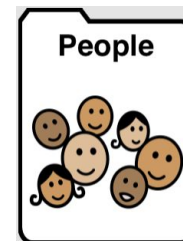
# Who is important to this student?



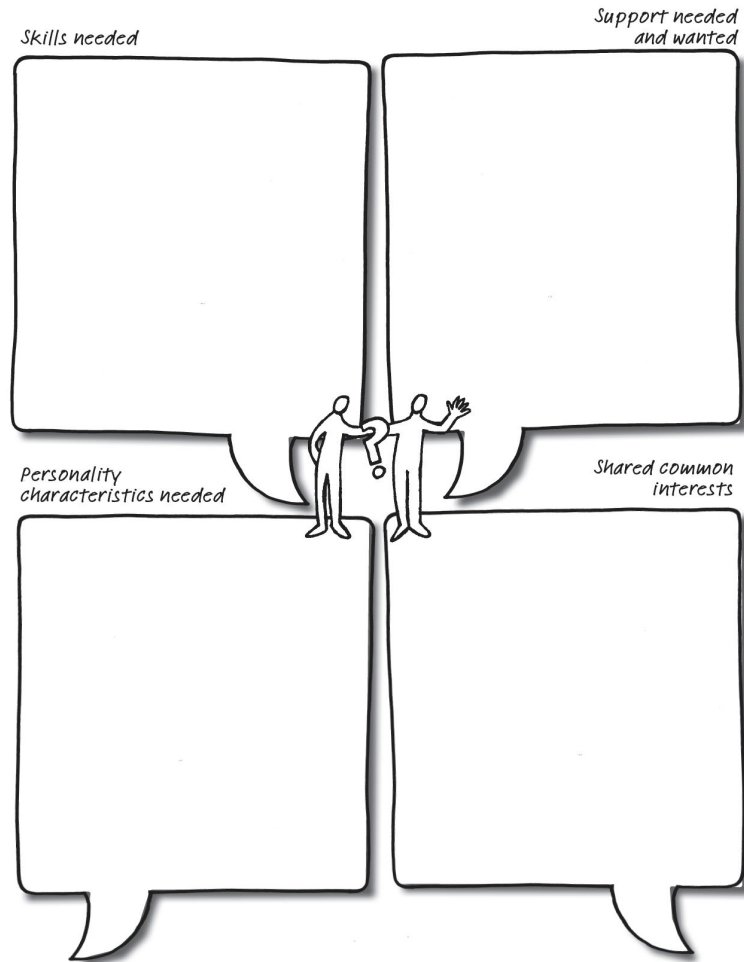
## 10-20 Options



## Topic card

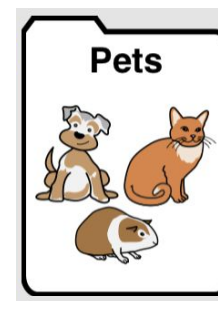
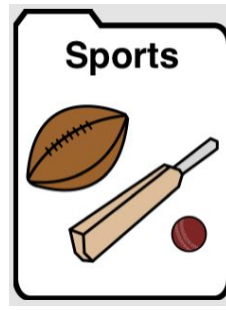
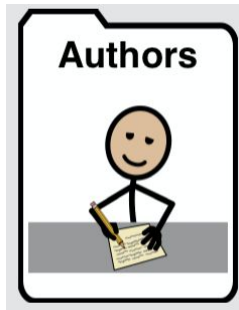
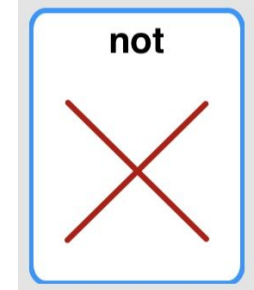
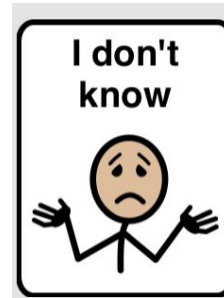
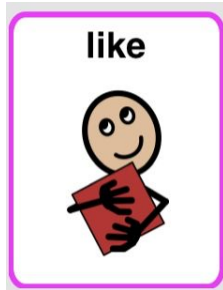


# Use Talking Mats to verify how the student wants to be supported

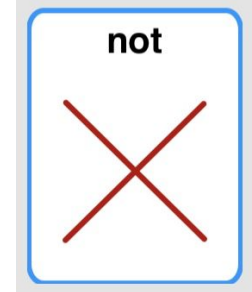
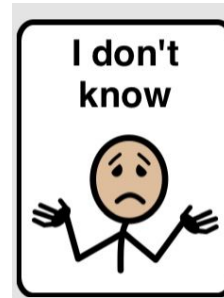
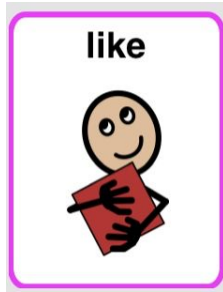


# What topics and interests do they need to explore?

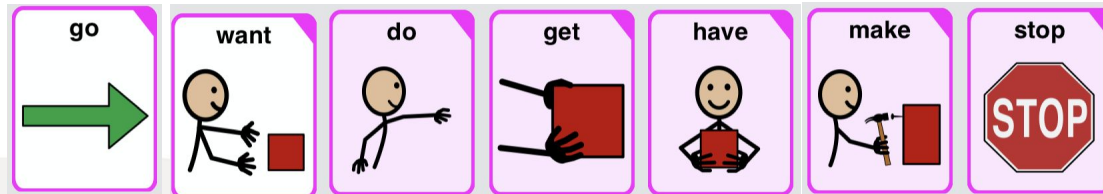
Invite friends/peers/siblings to model the process



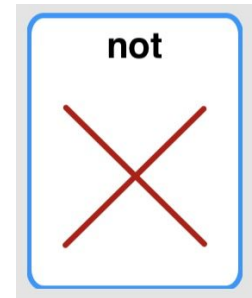
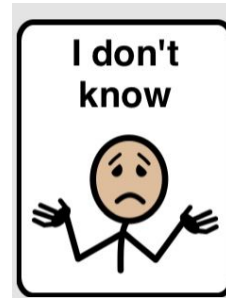
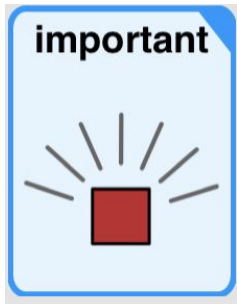
# What does this student need to explore and share?



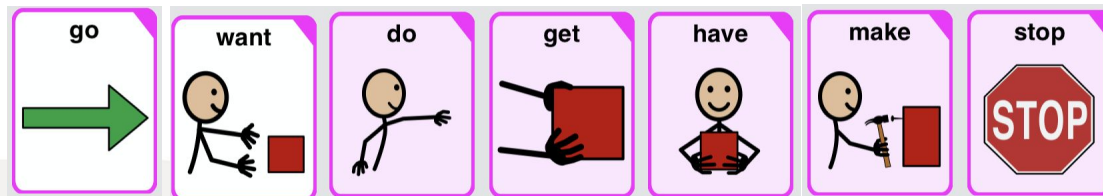
## Topic card



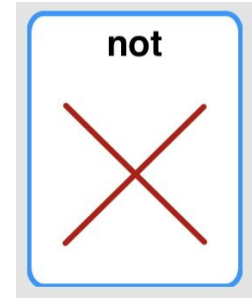
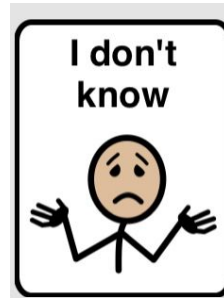
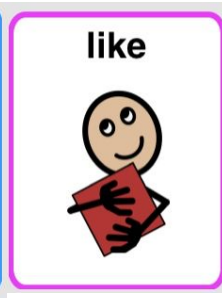
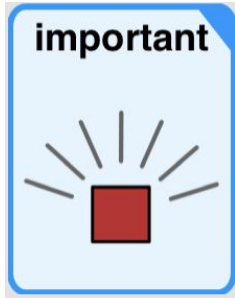
# What ideas, experiences, topics, and issues does this student need to explore?



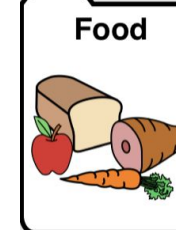
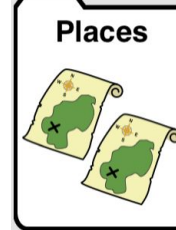
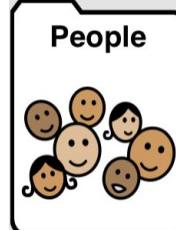
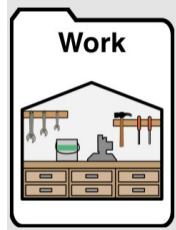
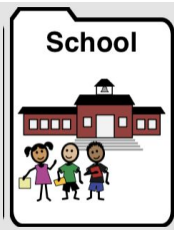
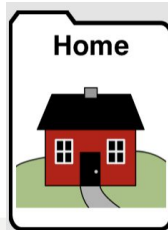
## Topic card



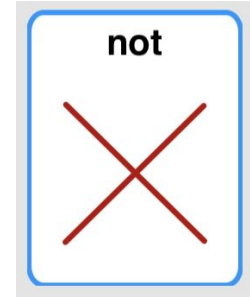
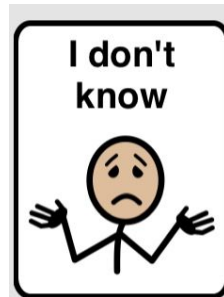
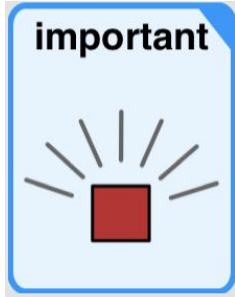
# What does this student want to change in their life?



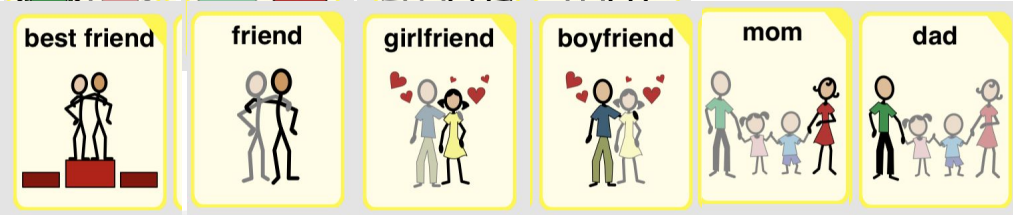
## Topic card



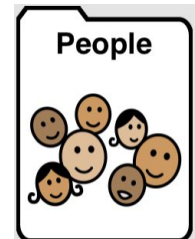
# What roles or relationships does the student want to expand, explore, or experience?



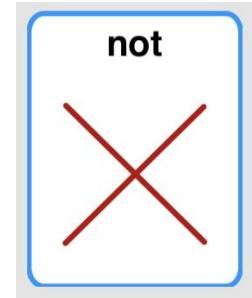
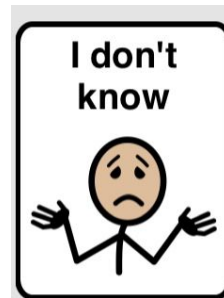
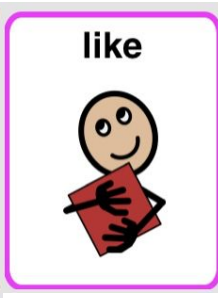
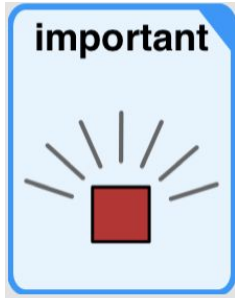
10-20 Options



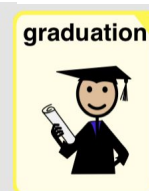
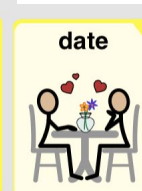
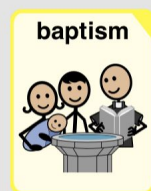
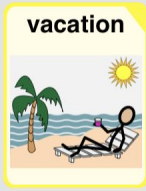
Topic card



# What milestones or events does the student want to explore or experience?



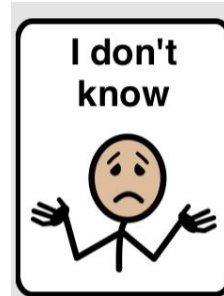
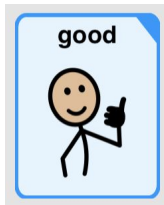
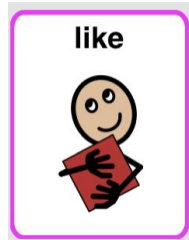
10-20 Options



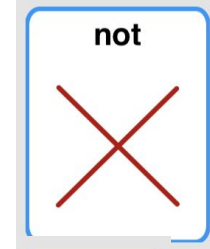
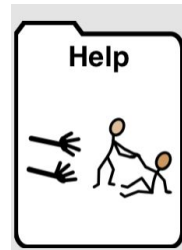
Topic card



# What paid support/staff is working for the student? What paid support/staff is not working?

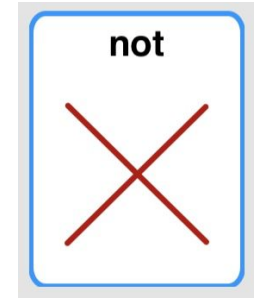
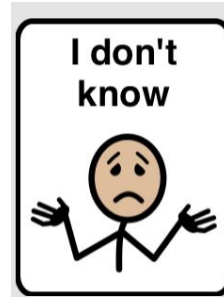
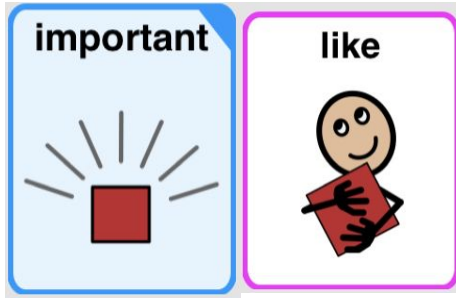


Topic card



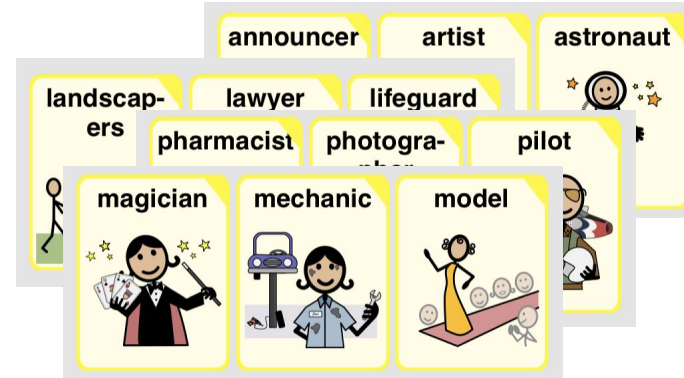
10-20 Options

# What jobs does the student want to explore or pursue?



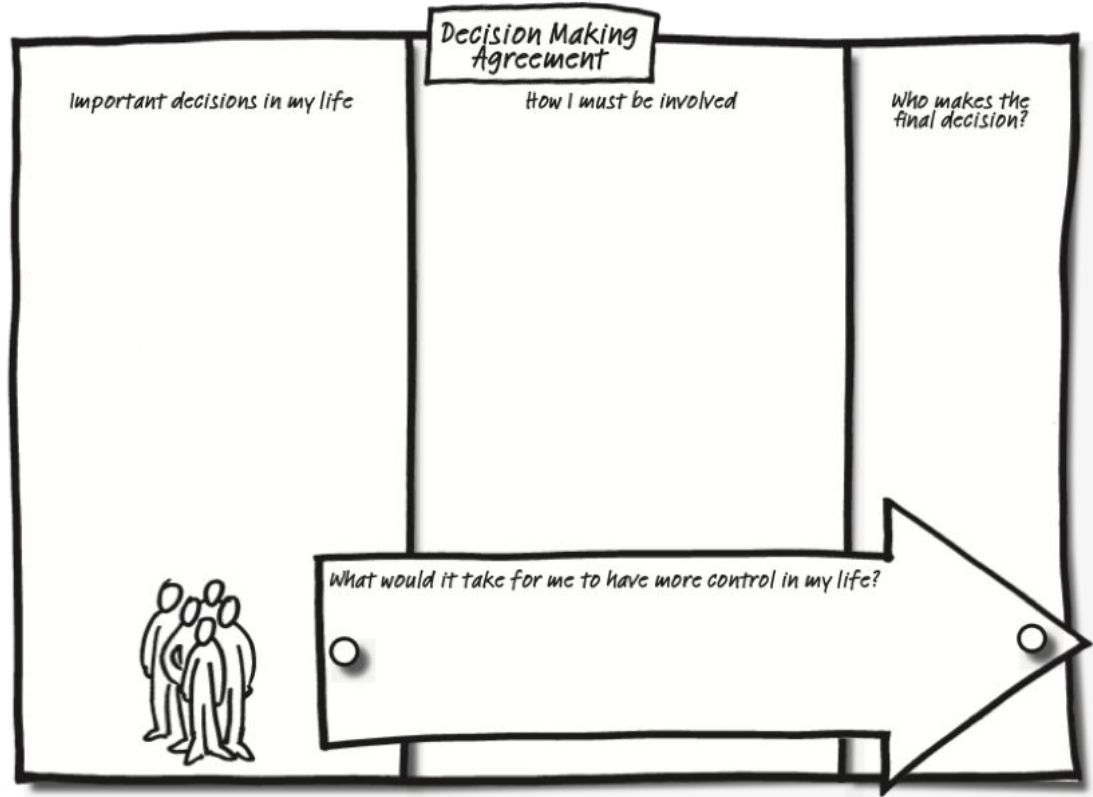
## 10-20 Options

### Topic card



# Decision-making Agreement

Take action:  
What the  
student  
expresses  
becomes a  
decision



**Decision Making Agreement**

Important decisions in my life

How I must be involved

Who makes the final decision?

What would it take for me to have more control in my life?

<b>Important decisions in my life</b>	<b>How I must be involved</b>	<b>Who makes the final decision</b>
<p>Entering or leaving a room</p>	<p>Vote with my feet Student may be invited and encouraged to stay in a room Offer choices of where else she can go</p>	<p>Student</p>
<p>Placement at school</p>	<p>Present in all IEP meetings Select the friends who will also be present Use What's Working/Not Working framework with photos and videos Respond with PAS to options over multiple conversations</p>	<p>Parent, with input from student</p>
<p>Courses at school</p>	<p>Use photos and videos to explore course options and instructors Take several weeks to explore Respond with PAS</p>	<p>Principal Student makes day-to-day decision about attendance</p>

# Decision-making Profile

identify the support the student needs to make a decision

<i>How I like to get information</i>	<i>How to present choices to me</i>	<i>Ways you can help me understand</i>	<i>When is the best time for me to make decisions?</i>	<i>When is a bad time for me to make a decision?</i>

**Discover what is unique about this student.**

**Verify what you learn.**

**Support them to participate in planning and  
have more choice and control**

Pick any of these tools or strategies that might be helpful at any given time.



[Home](#)

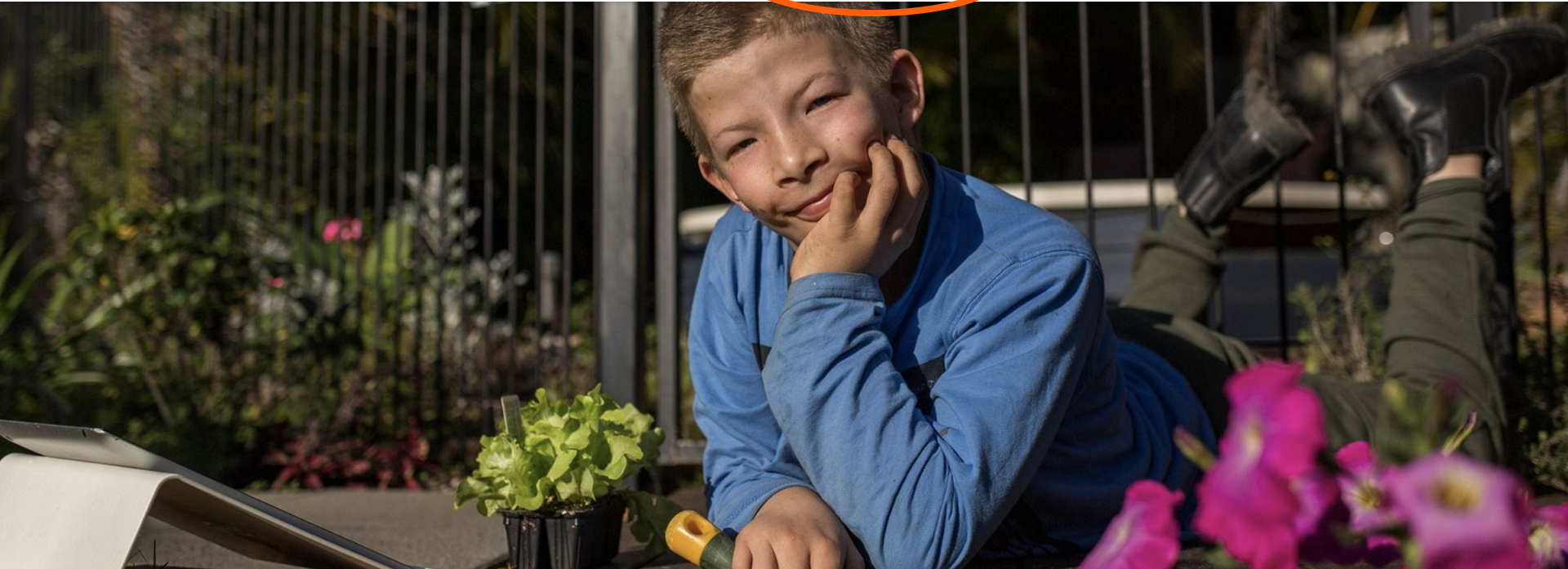
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# AAC for everyone articles

## AAC teams

- Presume competence
- How to be an AAC supporter
- AAC mentors: Role-models and experts for AAC users
- Finding AAC
- AAC for different communication impairments

## Make plans together

- How to be a respectful communication partner
- Using symbols and text for communication
- Considering all forms of communication
- 7 ways to include AAC users in conversation
- Planning for communication when AAC is not available
- 12 ways to make your community more communication accessible

## Autonomy, Advocacy and Safety

- Supported decision-making when you cannot speak
- 3 strategies to support choice and control for AAC users
- Reducing vulnerability for nonspeaking people
- Planning for AAC in medical settings

**Thank you for Joining Us**

**AAC for Transition Planning:  
Supporting all students to make decisions for the future**

**Questions for Erin**

[e.sheldon@assistiveware.com](mailto:e.sheldon@assistiveware.com)

AssistiveWare communities on Facebook