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Autism Agenda

Linn Benton Lincoln ESD-Cascade Regional Autism Program

BASIC STRATEGIES FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION

Although the effects of autism and Asperger s syndrome on a child s communication vary greatly, there are basic communication strategies parents can use to help their child.

KEEP LANGUAGE SIMPLE, SPECIFIC AND CONCRETE

We are usually unaware of the complexity of the language we use. While children can normally make enough sense out of complex sentences, a child with autism may have little understanding of "Come on, Tom. We don t live in a tent! You have to always close doors behind you, okay?" Tom would have a much better chance of understanding "Tom, shut the door".

While this style of communication appears to lack politeness, your child will have a greater chance of understanding and your respect can be indicated by your body language and tone of voice.

Language also needs to be specific. "Tom, you shouldn t be so rude to people" will be harder to understand than "Tom, don t tell people they are fat." Another common problem is giving instructions in the form of questions. "When are you going to tidy up your room?" can be very ambiguous compared to "clean up your room" although the former may sound more polite.

Concrete language refers to making the meaning of a sentence very plain - the words simply mean what they say. Much of our language involve sub meanings such as sarcasm, irony or reading between the lines and children with autism or Asperger s consistently have trouble with anything other than a literal meaning of the words spoken. Examples of difficult phrases to understand would be:

"Great work, I m sure that girl really enjoyed you pushing her into the mud!"

"I wonder if people might think it s unusual if you wear just your underpants in public".

ALLOW TIME FOR YOUR CHILD TO RESPOND

It may appear as though a child has not understood a question or statement, but often it just takes time to process the incoming information, up to 45 seconds in some cases. It can be frustrating and feel very abnormal, but giving your child time to respond will help them learn communication skills faster.

Repeating the question every few seconds to force a response,

or constant talking, can lead to challenging behaviors as the

child becomes frustrated by being overwhelmed with verbal information.

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BASIC STRATEGIES FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION CONTINUED...

ESTABLISH EYE CONTACT

A common feature of autism and Asperger s is a lack of eye contact. It is important to encourage proper eye contact. Other people are more likely to interact with your child, and it is the first step to your child learning to read the facial expressions of others or follow your line of sight if you are indicating an object by looking at it.

This may involve a simple statement: "Tom, look at me", or it may also involve stepping into the child s line of vision or a gesture with the hands to indicate the child should be looking at you during conversation. An important point here is to be at your child s level. While it is often tempting to stand when talking to your child, getting down to their level increases the chance of eye contact and bonding.

KEEP THE VOLUME AND TONE OF YOUR SPEECH MODERATE

While a loud angry tone of voice can be a useful part of discipline with challenging behaviors, it usually only worsens the situation for a child with Autism or Asperger s. There is frequently a heightened sensitivity to loud sounds and high pitched noises, so angry voices will often lead to challenging behaviors. There are many alternative ways to manage behaviors that don t involve raised voices. See the Behavior life skills page for more information on behavior management.

USE YOUR CHILD S INTERESTS TO BUILD MOTIVATION

Autism and Asperger s syndrome often result in a restricted range of interests, whether it be telephones, leaves or running water. Although a parent will not want to encourage an obsessive interest, these do provide a basis for building communication skills. Ask questions and encourage your child to talk about the things they like. As communication skills develop, you can encourage your child to talk about other things and widen their range of interests.

AVOID NEGATIVE WORDS THAT ACT AS TRIGGERS

Words such as not now , no and stop can act as triggers for challenging behavior in autistic children. When this happens, it is necessary to find positive statements that redirect the child s behavior. An example is a child who is playing with her toys instead of getting ready for school. Instead of saying No, Sarah. Stop playing with your toys , a redirection focuses on Let s put your clothes on for school .

While redirection sounds very easy, it can be very difficult to focus on a positive statement when getting frustrated with your child s lack of attention or inappropriate behavior.

BREAK INSTRUCTIONS OR LONG SENTENCES INTO STEPS

A key to helping a child learn complex skills is to break them into understandable pieces. The same principle works with communication. Take the following sentence:

"Today we ll have a swim at the beach after seeing grandad for morning tea and getting some fruit at the supermarket".

A children with Asperger s syndrome or autism will have trouble understanding this mass of information, and in what order it will happen. This would be better explained in order, one-by-one, and giving the child time to digest the information in each case .Techniques such as social stories or visual cues (photos or story boards) can also be a great help.

http://www.autism-help.org/communication-basic-strategies-autism.htm

Communicating Expectations

Communication can take many forms:

- Body language
- Touch
- Proximity (how far or close you stand)
- Spoken Language
- Icons

Though individuals with autism may present with difficulty communicating wants and needs, it's important to remember that so might a large portion of the people you come in contact with on a daily basis. In considering this, think about how you present your expectations, wants, and needs to students/children:

- Am I expressing myself clearly and thoughtfully?
  - Am I loud enough?
  - Is my tone neutral? Firm? Apprehensive?
  - Am I speaking too loudly?
  - Am I speaking too softly?
  - Is English the first language of the child I'm speaking with?
- Is my cadence appropriate?
  - Am I speaking too quickly?
  - Am I speaking too slowly?
- Does my body language convey anger or frustration or am I neutral and relaxed?
- Is my proximity to my student/child confrontational? Or, am I standing close enough to be heard?
- Am I repeating myself? If so:
  - Is there another way I could phrase my expectation? Less words?
  - Am I chaining too many steps in my request?
  - Am I phrasing my expectation as a demand rather than a request?
  - Am I expressing my expectation in a manner that conveys a clear beginning and end?
  - Is there another way I could present my expectation?
    - Drawing
    - Icons
    - Social Story
    - Listed procedures with a clear beginning and end

At the end of the day, it's important to know the student/child you're working with, how they learn, and how they interact on a daily basis. Be aware of your own body language, tone, cadence (how quickly or slowly you speak), and proximity. Communication of clear expectations with a definitive beginning and end can often help to navigate potentially challenging behavior. After all, we all like to know when meetings, workdays, and other various tasks at work are expected to begin and end, and so do the students/children we work with.

By: Ryan Stanley, Autism Consultant, LBL ESD

OCTOBER AAC AWARENESS MONTH

Throughout October, our speech-language pathologists will provide information and resources about Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). There are deals that are going on that you don't want to miss! If you need a refresher about what AAC is, check out our recent blog ***Communication, AAC and Speech Therapy***.

Here are some Free applications that we use in speech therapy:

1. ***SoundingBoard***. A free AAC app available for download in the iTunes store. This app includes pre-loaded communication boards, or you can create your own with up to 20-message locations.

2. ***GoTalk NOW Lite.*** A customizable, free AAC app that integrates the simplicity of Attainment's GoTalk devices and the dynamic abilities of an iPad.

3. ***Visuals2Go*** . Visuals2Go is created with children, teenagers and adults who have moderate to higher support needs in mind. It is distinct from other AAC in that it is super easy to use and it supports learners who need access to hands on visuals using the PRINT function as well as those who needs that extra simple user interface.

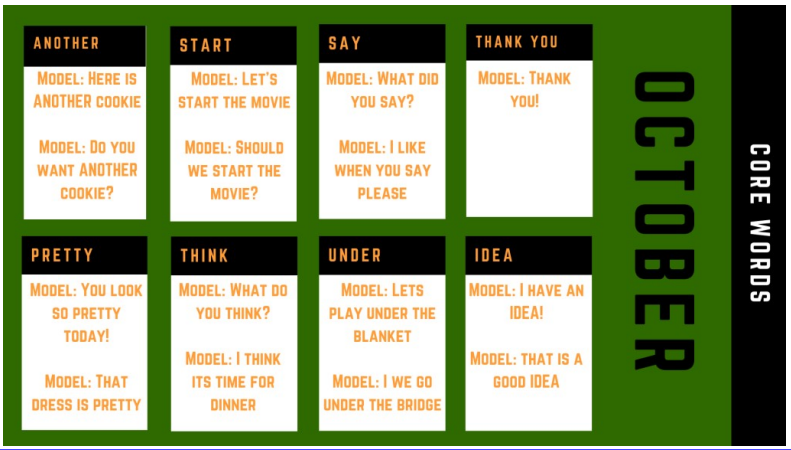
Several vendors provide great AAC deals this month. Here are some that we know of. We will keep sharing more as we learn about them:

1. 50% off of LAMP ***Words for Life Application October 3rd-6th.*** LAMP Words for Life is designed to meet the communication needs of children with autism. Furthermore, it was created to use in conjunction with Language Acquisition through Motor Planning (LAMP), a proven-therapeutic approach that uses consistent motor plans for accessing vocabulary.
2. **50% OFF *TOUCHCHAT APPS OCTOBER 3RD-6TH*.** TOUCHCHAT IS A FULL-FEATURED COMMUNICATION SOLUTION FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE DIFFICULTY USING THEIR NATURAL VOICE. TOUCHCHAT IS DESIGNED FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM, DOWN SYNDROME, ALS, APRAXIA, STROKE, OR OTHER CONDITIONS THAT AFFECT A PERSON'S ABILITY TO USE NATURAL SPEECH.

WAYS TO CELEBRATE:

1. Do you have questions about AAC? Call our office to talk with one of our Speech-Language Pathologists
2. Share this post with others
3. Check back to see our October blogs about AAC
4. Use October CORE words

https://nhws.us/augmentative-and-alternative-communication-awareness/



Autism Spectrum Disorder and Assistive Technology

What Do We Know About Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Communication?

Development of communication skills among children with autism does not follow so-called typical patterns. Children with ASD appear to learn differently than other children and frequently have difficulty with spoken and written language expression. Children with ASD may not speak at all, they may speak just a few words, or they may speak but what they say doesn't make sense in the situation. Children with ASD may have difficulty understanding spoken language – even if their hearing is "fine". They may also not be able to understand gestures, body language, and tone of voice that convey subtle differences in meaning. Children with ASD often demonstrate difficulties with overall motor planning. The motor planning involved in speaking – coordinating the mouth, lips, tongue and facial muscles – is extremely complex and requires sophisticated motor planning ability. Similarly, the motor planning involved in writing or using sign language is complex and can prove challenging for children with ASD. These factors complicate communication for children with ASD.

How Are Communication Barriers Addressed with Children With ASD?

Despite the communication challenges ASD can present, an assumption should never be made that nonspeaking children with autism don't or can't communicate, or that they will never "speak". An array of Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) approaches can be used to enhance, expand and develop communication skills. The three primary forms of AAC used with individuals with autism include unaided approaches (signs; gestures), "low tech" picture-based systems (for example, Picture Exchange Communication System -- PECS), communication books and boards and speech generating devices (SGDs). In addition, a variety of other assistive technology, such as portable word processers, can support effective written expression.

What Are Speech Generating Devices (SGDs)?

Speech Generating Device (SGD) is the term given to the hundreds of voice output devices commercially available that are designed to provide an effective means of verbal communication for individuals whose "natural speech" is not functional for them. Other terms sometimes used to describe these items are "voice output communication aids" (VOCA) or augmentative communication devices. SGDs range from simple, single message devices with less than a minute of speech output to highly complex, computer-based systems capable of storing or generating virtually unlimited numbers of messages. Some SGDs use recorded human speech (digitized). Others use computer-generated speech (synthesized) and some of those have text-to-speech capacity (as words are typed into the system, they are "spoken" by the device). Graphic symbols, most commonly in the form of line drawings, are used to represent messages, which are activated by finger, headstick or other method touching an area on the device that corresponds with the desired message. SGDs have either a static display where input for stored messages is fixed (like buttons or keys) or a dynamic display (like a touch computer screen) where the input can be changed quickly and often. For reasons unrelated to their effectiveness, utilization of SGDs lags far behind the use of other AAC systems (e.g. PECS and sign language) as an intervention option for students with ASD.

Do AAC systems deter speech development in children with ASD?

NO – It is erroneous to believe that if a child is given a communication device, in particular a SGD, it will hinder speech development. This seems to be based on the faulty assumption that using the AAC system is "easier" and the child will "give up" on the more difficult task of developing speech. Research and clinical experience indicate this is not true. Humans tend to use the most effective means of communication available to them to interact with others. It is usually much more efficient for a child to use speech and/or vocalizations if possible to communicate than to formulate a message using an augmentative communication system.

AAC will NOT interfere with speech development. AAC systems in general have been shown to not interfere with speech development for those individuals who have the capacity to develop natural speech, and there is evidence that AAC can facilitate speech development for some children. Research suggests that once an AAC system is introduced and an effective means of communication is available some children improve their language skills as well. In any case, appropriate AAC interventions will almost ALWAYS improve communication.

While research is inconclusive about how AAC actually supports speech development, some believe use of the AAC system reduces pressure on the child to develop speech as the sole communication mechanism and that results in greater speech production skill development. Others postulate the AAC system supports continued development of language skills and conversational skills, which translates into increased speech production.

Because of fears that AAC will impede speech development, there is a mistaken belief that AAC should be introduced only after giving up all hope on development of natural speech. This should not happen! By exposing a child to years of failed communication attempts, we increase the likelihood that other effective but unacceptable means of communicating will be used (e.g. excess "behavior" like throwing a chair to mean "I'm bored with sitting at this table") or communication will decrease altogether. For children with ASD, AAC should not be viewed as a wholesale replacement for natural speech, but rather as a supplement or alternative means to provide functional communication access as natural speech development is pursued. The choice is NOT BETWEEN AAC or "natural" speech, but how to use AAC – including SGDs, unaided, and low tech approaches - to maximally support development of natural speech and effective communication.

Why Use SGDs ?

Although sign language and low –tech picture-based systems (including PECS) have established records of success with students with ASD, there are a variety of features that make SGDs compelling options as part of an AAC intervention for children with ASD. SGDs provide speech output, which is more readily understood and accepted by other communication partners (e.g. family members, community members, professionals, peers, etc.). Because the output is spoken, communication partners don't need to learn special skills like how to interpret pictures or gestural messages. SGDs also provide the child with an auditory model of what the message sounds like when it is "spoken". Speech output can transcend distance, e.g. can be used for telephone communication, or when the listener cannot make eye contact with the child (e.g. when mom is driving and the child is in the back seat).

High end, dynamic screen devices come pre-loaded with extensive symbol arrays that can be organized with little effort and in many instances new page sets can be developed on the fly. Low tech, static devices generally use overlays that can easily be changed and, increasingly, more and more companies are utilizing bar code technology that improves the ease of use. Many SGDs are designed to be portable and durable. Implementation and observation by speech language pathologists, special educators and other professionals has uncovered additional positives in support of SGDs including:

The "techie" nature of SGDs is appealing and motivating to children with ASD. Use of SGDs may be less stigmatizing than PECS and other AAC systems.

Children with ASD frequently prefer visual stimuli. SGDs use a visual medium, frequently a dynamic visual interface, making them effective for children with ASD.

Most SGDs require only simple motor movements to operate, bypassing the motor planning difficulties that some children with ASD evidence.

SGDs often can serve to preempt difficult behaviors since they provide a quick, consistent means to express needs and wants.

When Should AAC Be Considered For Use With A Child With ASD?

As soon as readily possible! All children with ASD deserve access to an effective and efficient communication system including a full range of AAC options that can be used to support positive cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral development. That includes consideration of SGDs. Simple SGDs such as the single message BIGmacks can be used at roughly the same time that non-disabled children begin to speak. More advanced devices can be introduced as appropriate based on the child's development. The first years of a child's life are critical to language and speech development and children with ASD need the same opportunities available to non-disabled children -- language rich environments and encouragement to express their thoughts and needs.

Are There Any Cognitive Prerequisites A Child Must Have To Use SGDs?

There are no cognitive prerequisites for using an SGD. It is extremely difficult to assess the cognitive ability of some children with ASD. Thus, it is important to assume cognitive and communication potential. An SGD provides a framework for the development of language and as a result, regardless of the current cognitive/language level at which a child with ASD functions, an SGD can support and expand that existing language. When a child with ASD is able to communicate, his or her cognitive abilities can become more evident. This can change the perception of parents, peers, teachers and the child himself.

Are There Any Specific SGDs For Use With Children With ASD?

Any SGD can serve as a first step in exploring communication with children who have ASD. Evaluation usually proceeds through the identification of device features that will "match" the needs of the child. Features include the number of messages that can be stored, the system for retrieving messages, the approach to combining units of meaning (e.g. to generate new messages), the system used to represent vocabulary, the potential of the device to "grow" as the child's language develops, the flexibility of the device (e.g. to run other software programs), etc.

How Are AAC Companies Addressing the Unique Needs Of Children With ASD?

Visual Scene Displays, Built-In Digital Cameras and hardware design are some of the recent trends that companies have been introducing to assist children with ASD communicate. Several digitized and synthesized devices now provide visual scene displays. Traditionally, SGDs have utilized a grid screen approach that divides the screen or page into various target areas. Visual scene displays portray events, people, actions and objects against the backdrops in which they occur or exist, helping to provide context and meaning. Active areas, or hot spots, within the scene provide links to specific words, phrases and messages for communication.

A second recent development is the provision of built-in digital cameras. The traditional text and symbols used to represent language can sometimes be a barrier to acquiring effective communication. Digital photos and video clips provide concrete representation and eliminate the need to learn new symbols. They also simplify and make the communication process more natural. The ability to take digital images and quickly embed them into new communication pages shows significant promise to help children develop new language skills, prepare them for new situations and help add context to their world.

What other assistive technology (AT) can be used to support children with ASD?

Children with ASD can benefit from a variety of assistive technologies in addition to AAC such as:

Assistive Technology	Description	Used To Address
Portable Word Processor	Keyboard with small LED screen	Poor fine motor or motor planning skills for writing
Talking Word Processor	Writing software programs that provide speech feedback	Poor fine motor, motor planning, cognitive, or combination
Text To Speech Software	Program used to convert text from print to audio formats	Poor reading comprehension, decoding, fluency, etc.
Visual Assistants Electronic/Non-Electronic Organizers	Graphic symbols sequentially laying out events/activities (may also have auditory cues)	Behavior issues and develop task completion/focus and language/ communication skills
Headphones	Earphones that cancel extraneous environmental noise	Auditory overstimulation issues
Assistive Listening Systems	Speaker worn transmitter and listener worn receiver or near placed speakers	Deficits in attention and listening comprehension and auditory overstimulation issues

How are good decisions made about assistive technology for children with ASD?

Making decisions about assistive technology (AT) is similar to making decisions about other services for children with any disability. A team approach is necessary with members knowledgeable about the child, his/her strengths and limitations, the activities, tasks, and environments in which he/she function, and the range and scope of potential AT options to address specific needs. The team should have access to AT to use in structured device trials in the environment(s) in which the child will be using the technology (e.g. home, school, community, etc.) This allows for device trial data to be comparatively analyzed; in particular different device features and functions can be compared to determine which best addresses the child's functional needs. Using this analysis, the team can make cogent decisions about AT acquisition. Teams and professional providers conducting device trials can borrow a full range of AT from ETC, a short-term device loan program operated by Missouri Assistive Technology (MoAT). Additional information about borrowing can be found on the MoAT website, www.at.mo.gov or by contacting MoAT at 800/647-8557 or etcdeviceloan@swbell.net.

Professionals who specialize in AT can provide teams with valuable support in decision-making. For some types of AT, funding sources require evaluations by specific providers (e.g. Missouri Medicaid requires approved sites provide the evaluation and recommendation for AAC funding; Medicare requires a licensed speech-language pathologist evaluation/recommendation for AAC funding; and many private insurance plans require a physician prescription for certain types of AT funding.) Teams should be familiar with and access specialty resources as necessary to support decision-making and to secure AT funding as required by specific sources. See the MoAT website for more information about evaluation sites and funding sources for assistive technology.

file:///C:/Users/michelle.neilson/Desktop/Autism%20communicaton%20and%20assistive%20technology.pdf

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

ABOUT AAC

You may have seen someone write in a notebook to answer a question. Maybe you have seen people using sign language or other gestures. You may have seen someone push buttons on a computer that speaks for them. These are all forms of augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC.

AAC includes all of the ways we share our ideas and feelings without talking. We all use forms of AAC every day. You use AAC when you use facial expressions or gestures instead of talking. You use AAC when you write a note and pass it to a friend or coworker. We may not realize how often we communicate without talking.

People with severe speech or language problems may need AAC to help them communicate. Some may use it all of the time. Others may say some words but use AAC for longer sentences or with people they don't know well. AAC can help in school, at work, and when talking with friends and family.

TYPES OF AAC

Do you or your loved one have difficulty talking? There are options that might help. There are two main types of AAC—unaided systems and aided systems. You may use one or both types. Most people who use AAC use a combination of AAC types to communicate.

Unaided Systems

You do not need anything but your own body to use unaided systems. These include gestures, body language, facial expressions, and sign language.

Aided Systems

An aided system uses some sort of tool or device. There are two types of aided systems— basic and high-tech. A pen and paper is a basic aided system. Pointing to letters, words, or pictures on a board is a basic aided system. Touching letters or pictures on a computer screen that speaks for you is a high-tech aided system. Some of these speech-generating devices, or SGDs, can speak in different languages.

WORKING WITH A SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST

An SLP will test how well you or your loved one can speak and understand. The SLP can help find the right AAC system for you. You may use a basic system first and may need it for only a short time. This may happen if you had mouth surgery or a stroke and your speech comes back.

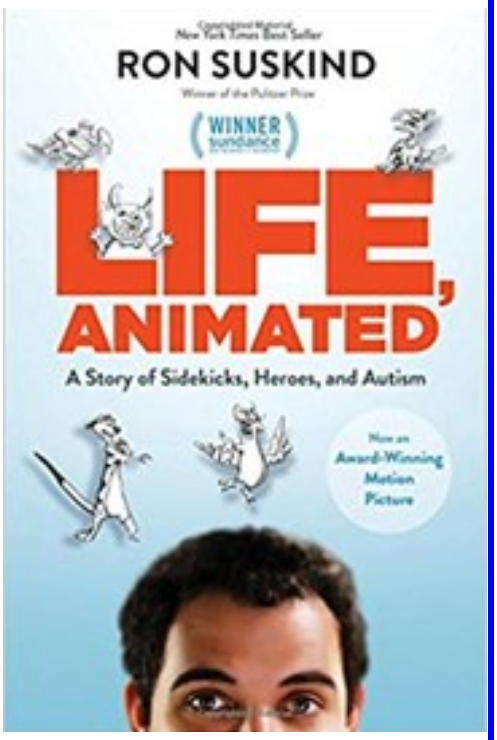
It may take some time to get a more high-tech system, if you need one. Not every device works for every person, so it is important to find the right one for you. The Information for AAC Users webpage has more information about finding the best AAC system. Insurance or other funding can help you pay for your AAC device.

See ASHA information for professionals on the Practice Portal s Augmentative and Alternative Communication page.

https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/AAC/

BOOK REVIEWS

Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes and Autism



by Ron Suskind

Imagine being trapped inside a Disney movie and having to learn about life mostly from animated characters dancing across a screen of color. A fantasy? A nightmare? This is the real-life story of Owen Suskind, the son of the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ron Suskind and his wife, Cornelia. An autistic boy who couldn't speak for years, Owen memorized dozens of Disney movies, turned them into a language to express love and loss, kinship, and brotherhood. The family chose to become animated characters, communicating with him in Disney dialogue and song. Eventually, they all emerged together, revealing how, in darkness, we all literally need stories to survive. Now also a motion picture made by Academy Award winning director Roger Ross Williams.

The book and the film represent a significant shift within autism education: Owen's special interest is respected, valued and validated, as opposed to being pathologized as a perseveration or obsession. Here are four different ways educators and caregivers can incorporate a child's interests to incite more communication, motivation and engagement:

Follow a student's lead

If a student uses language or makes gestures that may be related to a special interest, play along! Watch what a student focuses most of his or her time and emotion on. This may be a special interest area. They may be afraid to tell you what they love or think about. Draw them out, embrace them as an expert, and have them "teach" you something.

Provide frequent references to the interest

Mention your student's special interest at any opportunity. For a reluctant reader who loves insects, a cut-out picture of an ant at the end of a popsicle stick can make a motivating pointer to move as they read line-by-line. Even something as simple as stickers of stars and planets can make an astronomy buff more comfortable and excited about her work.

Use the language of the special interest

Find a way to use the language of your student's interest to motivate him. For example, for a Star Wars fan, being told to "use the Force to unload the last two dishes" out of the dishwasher will likely help more than, "Finish up – you're almost done." A child who has a particular hero connected to her interest might love to hear, "You're racing through this writing homework like Lightning McQueen!" (from the movie *Cars*).

Teach through metaphor and comparisons

Sometimes the facts and information of a student's interest connect to the task or expectation they might struggle with. Think of ways that your student's challenge relates to an aspect of their interest. For a student who struggles with flexibility, but who loves Angry Birds, you can remind them that we occasionally need to use a different strategy by saying, "Sometimes we just need to try to use a different bird. Can we switch to the yellow bird for this?" For a fan of Disney princesses having a hard time waiting in line at the grocery store, encourage her, "I know you can wait in line patiently just like Snow White did for Prince Charming!"

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VISUALS