My Documents/printable_articles/article_52_visual_schedules_and_choice_boards
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dimensional). A spoken (i.e., verbal) presentation of choices is often not effective with individuals with autism spectrum disorders. They may not listen to the whole message, they may not be tuned into the message until the speaker is already mentioning the second or third option, and the message may be quickly forgotten. With a visual display, the individual has time to see all the possibilities, has time to think about the decision, and has time to check the options as often as he or she needs, before making a decision.

The primary purpose of a choice board, then, is to present a visual display of options. It is a strategy that will aid or support the comprehension of the auditory message and choice situation by circumventing the rapid disappearance of the spoken message regarding choices. Under most circumstances, if the speaker says, "Do you want crackers or apples?" the message is over in less than a few seconds. The visual display of choices can be reviewed indefinitely relative to the spoken message alone. Although the person with autism spectrum disorders makes an expressive response when he or she does make a choice, it is a very limited communicative response to a situation initiated by someone else. The person with autism cannot express much more than "want" or "not want" relative to the choices.

**Augmentative Communication Systems (AAC) or Meeting Expressive Communication Needs**

Neither the schedule nor the choice display function as an alternative or augmentative "voice" for the nonverbal person with autism spectrum disorders. Neither one has as its primary purpose the objective of making the individual a more efficient communicator. Augmentative systems (or AAC which stands for augmentative and alternative communication) are focused on expressive communication by the individual who needs augmented support for his vocal abilities. It is not a system of support for aiding comprehension of the speech of others.

Well-designed augmentative systems allow an individual to express a variety of messages. The messages may be requests, directives, refusals, comments, questions, social greetings, and so forth. Augmentative systems allow the person to shift roles from responding to the communication of others to initiating topics, comments, or requests. Augmentative displays can consist of tangible symbol displays, pictures organized on manila folders, to sophisticated displays accessed through computers. Unlike schedule and choice displays which usually represent the messages that the adult (teacher, parents, etc.) wishes to convey, the thrust of an AAC system is to enable the person to express the messages that he or she (i.e., the person with autism spectrum disorders) would like to convey.

Keeping the distinctions clear relative to the purpose/use of schedule and choice boards is important for family and service providers. Without an understanding of that distinction, some individuals with autism spectrum disorders will be robbed of access to an expressive medium that allows them to utter a variety of messages. Without the experience of using a comprehensive expressive system, they may fail to gain an understanding or appreciation of the potential power of communication.

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