

Hello, my name is William and I am a great communicator but, in my life, there have been some challenges with access to communication. I would like to open the discussion today with some thoughts about this need in our community.

Access to communication in my team meetings can make all the difference. Rather than being the person at the center of the conversation that everyone is talking about without my input, I can lead the conversation when I am supported. The thing is, we all need to be heard and that is almost impossible when you are fighting for an AAC device or communication partner in the first place. How about we find a way to build a team with my communication supports so we can have my goals at the center of the conversation? Communication should not be an accommodation; it should be the expectation.

Communication is more than a device, it might also include support. My communication partner is the fuel to keep me going. I can feel a calmness with a communication partner that knows my impulsive body is not a behavior. They help me with staying focused. I need them to help me with my sensory regulation. They help me with problem solving technology or bringing the team to understand the supports I need. For example, sometimes the settings on my iPad or computer change making it hard for me to see or be heard. There is also the support of reading aloud and writing notes for me.

An effective communication partner needs training in understanding how to support me with where my motor is working in each situation. Training must be provided to those who directly support me. Ineffective communication partners will compromise my ability to fully participate. This could include:

- An overview of presumption of competence, AAC, motor differences, and supporting communication.
- Personalized Communication Coaching: To include in service and hands on training specific to me
- Follow up Communication Coaching: monthly, to be provided at the conclusion of the Communication Coaching hours.

As an adult, a future without a barrier to access communication would mean that I could live a life that is steered by me in the driver's seat. Choice in your destination takes you where you want to go instead of being placed where someone thinks you belong. Shouldn't we all have a choice?