

Communication, Connection, & Consent: AAC Vocabulary Access for Sexual Health

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- By the end of this session, participants will be able to...

Develop at least 2 rationales to support access to sexual health, intimacy, and/or relationship vocabulary for AAC users

Describe 3 or more examples of sexual health, intimacy, and/or relationship vocabulary to include in AAC systems/devices for each life-stage

Describe at least 2 implementation strategies for AAC inclusive sex education

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PRESENTATION DISCLAIMERS

- I am speaking from the perspective of a speech-language pathologist specializing in AAC.
- I will use a variety of identity-first & person-first language to accommodate both preferences.



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CONTENT WARNING

- This presentation will discuss...
 - Explicit language
 - Sexual health terminology
 - Abuse
- This presentation contains images symbolizing concepts/vocabulary related to talking about:
 - Reproductive/sexual anatomy
 - Sexual health & activity
 - Violence/abuse



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ACRONYMS

- AAC: augmentative & alternative communication
- AT: assistive technology
- DD: developmental disability
- ID: intellectual disability
- SGD: speech-generating device
- SLP: speech-language pathologist (speech therapist)

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ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- Any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capacities of individuals with disabilities.
 - Can be acquired commercially, modified, or customized

 A collage of eight small images showing individuals using different types of assistive technology, including a person using a laptop with a specialized keyboard, a person using a communication device, a person using a wheelchair, a person using a hearing aid, a person using a prosthetic arm, a person using a communication device, a person using a hearing aid, and a person using a prosthetic arm.

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WHAT IS AAC?

- **AAC** = Augmentative & Alternative Communication
 - **Augmentative:** adds to someone's speech
 - **Alternative:** used instead of speech
- Includes communication methods other than oral speaking/talking
 - Gestures
 - Facial expressions
 - Writing & drawing
 - Using pictures, symbols, etc.
 - Using a device
- We all use forms of AAC

 A close-up image of a person's head and shoulders, showing they are using a communication device.

Based on ASHA's definition of AAC.

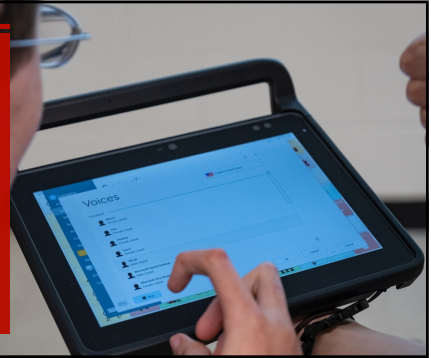
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EXAMPLES OF AAC



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RESEARCH REVIEW



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STATE OF SEX EDUCATION FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

- A 2012 national survey of special education students revealed only 53.1% of youth with disabilities participated in sex education (Holmes, 2021)
- Students with developmental & intellectual disabilities are frequently excluded from sex education
- If students with disabilities were present to the lesson, the content may not have been accessible
- Curriculum developed for youth with disabilities is not always evidence-based (Holmes, 2021)
 - Content is often censored or vague
- Adult competencies and willingness to implement sexual health education varies (Cacciatore et al., 2020)
 - Children do not receive equal, age-appropriate information
 - Children with disabilities are especially at risk of receiving insufficient sexual education

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WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- People with physical/severe speech disabilities are 2-6 times more likely to experience abuse (Sobsey, 1994)
- In a 2003 study of AAC users, 45% of 40 adults who participated experience crime or abuse (Bryen, Carey, & Frantz, 2003)
 - 28% reported to police
- 73-88% of participants in the Speak Up Project reported "no means" for communication about healthy sexuality and related topics (Collier et al., 2006)

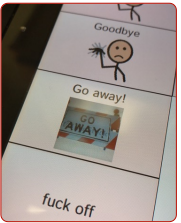
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WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR AAC?

- AAC users often have limited (or no) access to the words needed to talk about taboo topics
- Many adults and teenagers do not have swear words, expletives, slang, etc.
- Words related to sexual health and sexuality are not readily available
- Importance of understanding of profanity and sex related vocabulary
 - To identify and differentiate verbal abuse
 - Report abuse



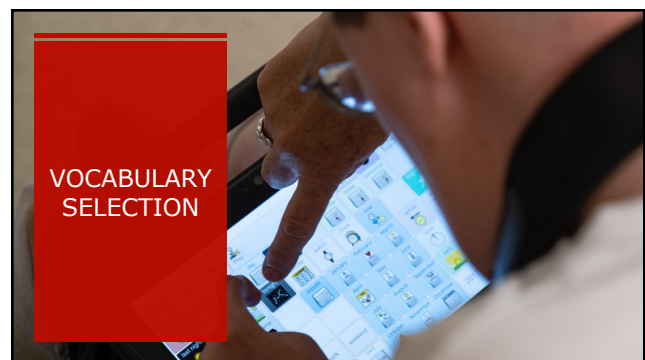
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CURRENT BARRIERS REPORTED/OBSERVED

- Limitations in available systems
- Supports persons who program a device may censor the language available
 - Censoring may be due to:
 - Personal bias, prejudice
 - Misconceptions, not presuming competence or ability to learn
 - Replacing terms with more "appropriate" alternatives
 - Limited knowledge (e.g., parent not being aware of trending slang for teens)
 - Not updating vocabulary access throughout the lifespan (unintentional/intentional)
- Limitations in current AAC teaching strategies for children, emergent communicators, etc.



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Younger Children	Elementary	Middle School	High School to Adult
• Proper names for body parts • Bodily function words (art, poop, etc.) • Words for boundaries & consent • No • Hug • Touch	• Expand on previous • Slang for body parts & bodily functions • Words that peers are using • Friendship & relationship words • Vocabulary related to puberty & hygiene	• Update slang • Proper terms for sexual health vocabulary • Continued expansion of vocabulary related to puberty & hygiene	• Proper terms for sexual health as needed • Words for relationships & intimacy based on personal preference of the individual

NOTE: These are some suggestions of vocabulary to consider for different age groups based on the research of profanity, taboos, & sexual health concept knowledge. Personal, family, & cultural values might influence when & what words are introduced. This is an extremely sensitive topic & there is no "one size fits all" solution. There are many factors to consider when discussing whether to include or exclude certain words.

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CONTENT AREAS FOR VOCABULARY SELECTION

- Consent & Healthy Relationships
- Anatomy & Physiology
- Puberty & Adolescent Sexual Development
- Gender Identity & Expression
- Sexual Orientation & Identity
- Sexual Health
- Interpersonal Violence

Derived from the Future of Sex Education Initiative. (2020). [National Sex Education Standards: Core Content and Skills, K-12 \(Second Edition\)](#).

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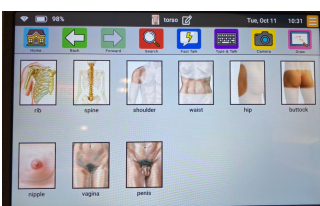
CONSENT & HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

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ANATOMY & PHYSIOLOGY

Vocabulary for talking about...

- Body parts (including reproductive system & genitalia)
- Bodily functions

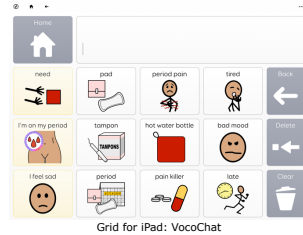


The screenshot shows the Lingraphica app interface on a tablet. At the top, there's a status bar with icons for Wi-Fi, signal strength, 100% battery, and the time 10:21 on Tue, Sep 15. Below the status bar is a navigation bar with icons for Home, Back, Forward, Search, and a 'DIAL' button. The main area displays a grid of anatomical images. The first row includes: 'rib' (a diagram of a rib cage), 'spine' (a diagram of a human spine), 'shoulder' (a photograph of a person's shoulder), 'waist' (a photograph of a person's waist), 'leg' (a photograph of a person's leg), and 'buttock' (a photograph of a person's buttocks). The second row includes: 'nipple' (a photograph of a nipple), 'vagina' (a photograph of a vagina), and 'penis' (a photograph of a penis). The app is titled 'Lingraphica' at the bottom.

PUBERTY & ADOLESCENT SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Vocabulary for talking about...

- Bodily changes & sexual development
 - Example: words related to menstruation
- Emotional development
- Hygiene & personal care



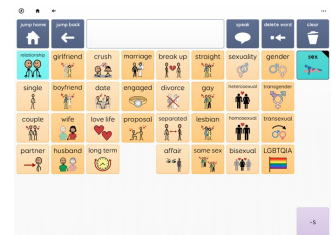
Grid for iPad: VocoChat

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GENDER IDENTITY & EXPRESSION

Vocabulary for talking about...

- Personal identity as it relates to gender
- Gender roles
- Advocating for self, safety, & equity



Grid for iPad: Super Core 50

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SEXUAL ORIENTATION & IDENTITY

Vocabulary for talking about...

- Personal identity as it relates to sexual orientation
- Advocating for self, safety, & equity



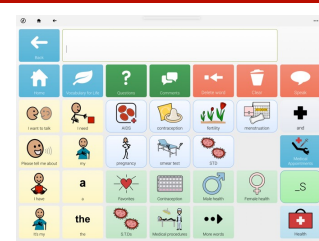
TD Snap

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SEXUAL HEALTH

Vocabulary for talking about...

- Sexually transmitted infections/diseases
 - Prevention, symptoms, & treatment
- Pregnancy
 - How it happens, prevention, & options
- Healthcare decision-making
- Other medical concerns related to sexual health



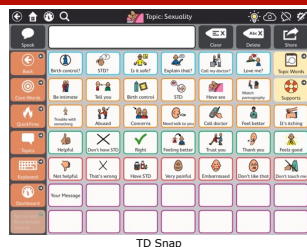
Grid for iPad: Vocabulary for Life

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INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

Vocabulary for talking about...

- Reporting abuse
- Asking for help
- Prevention & intervention
- Resources & local services



TD Snap

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IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES



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IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

- Word choice is a personal choice
 - Consider the age, environments, & preferences of the AAC user
 - Family & cultural considerations may influence decisions (especially for children & teens)
- Not every strategy suggestion will work for all individuals
- It is important to talk about these words/concepts
 - Ex: Certain words are harmful & should not be used except for reporting name calling, bullying, abuse, etc.



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PRIVATE OR PUBLIC?

- "Awareness of norms, taboos, and privacy is learned at an early age" (Cacciatore et al., 2020)
- Certain words/concepts are for "private" conversations (Albrecht & Strickler, 2022)
 - "Private" should not be confused with "secret" or be considered shameful
 - This could include words for sexual anatomy/health
 - "Private" conversations can be used with trusted/familiar communication partners (not limited to)
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Support persons/caregivers
 - Healthcare professionals



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INTIMACY & CONSENT

- Access to sexual health & anatomy vocabulary
 - Model & use body part vocabulary during daily hygiene routines
- Model consent in everyday situations (hugs, high fives, etc.)
- For teens & adults:
 - Supporting them in having vocabulary for intimacy & relationships on their device
- Reporting abuse



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CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADULTS WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

- Sex & intimacy are important ADLs for many people
 - Communication plays a key role
- Physical intimacy can look different (& may be challenging) after acquired disability
 - Changes in mobility status
 - Difficulty communicating "in the moment"
- Clinicians can:
 - Support the client & their partner
 - Discuss communication strategies
 - Help identify vocabulary/phrases to program
 - "Spicy" bedroom talk vs. medical terminology

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MORE
AAC
EXAMPLES

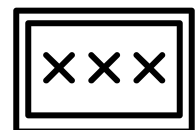


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UPCOMING: CONTENT WARNING

The next few slides will contain...

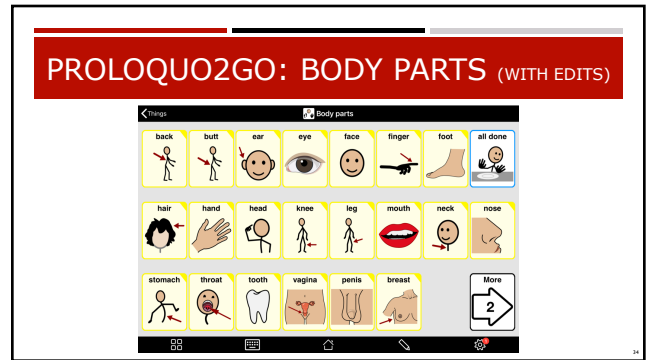
- Explicit language
- Symbols of reproductive/sexual anatomy



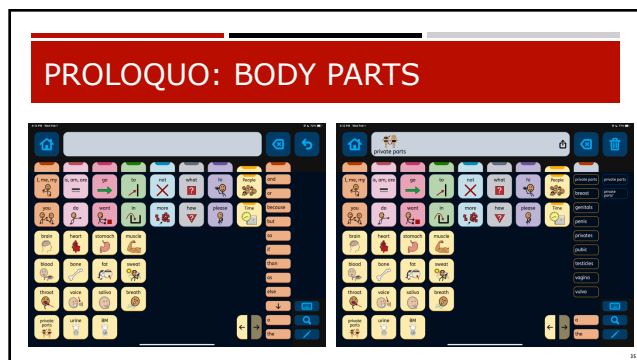
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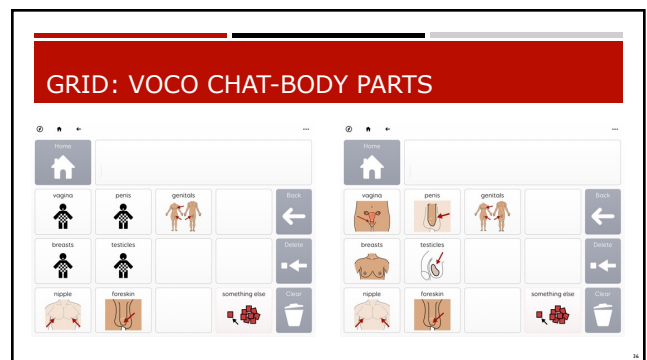
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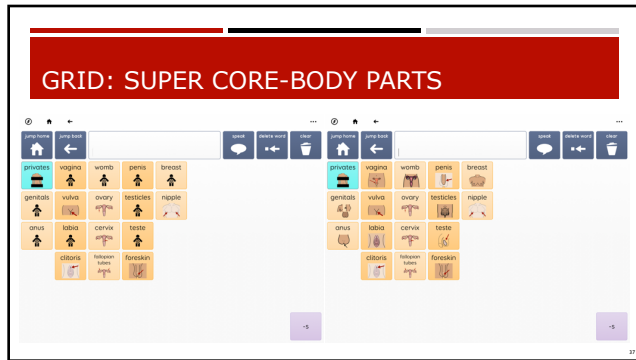
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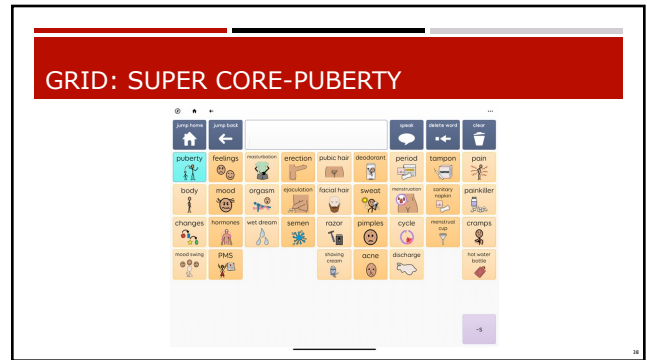
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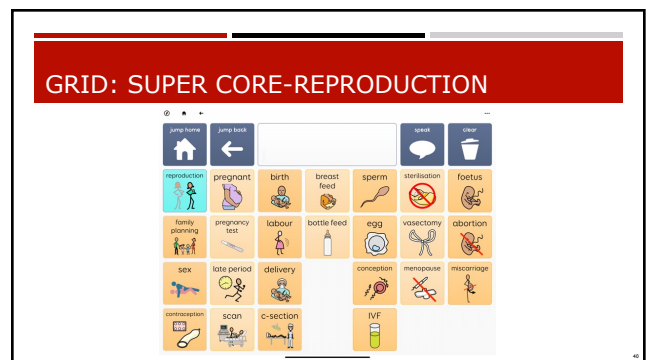
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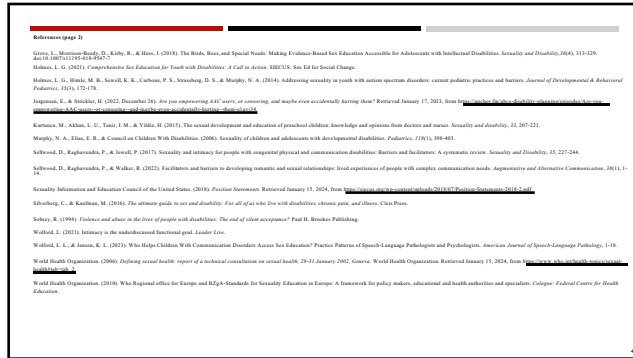
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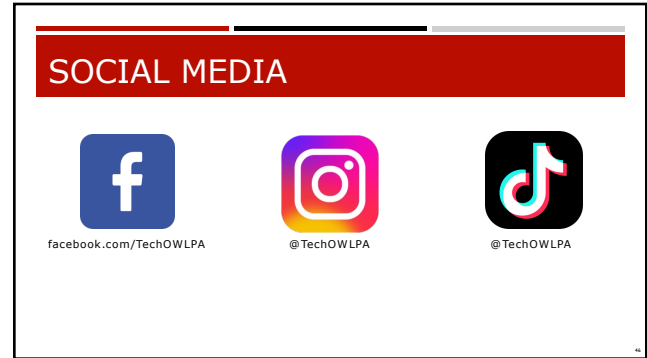
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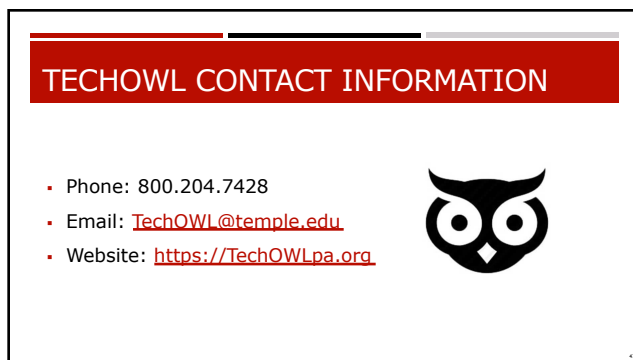
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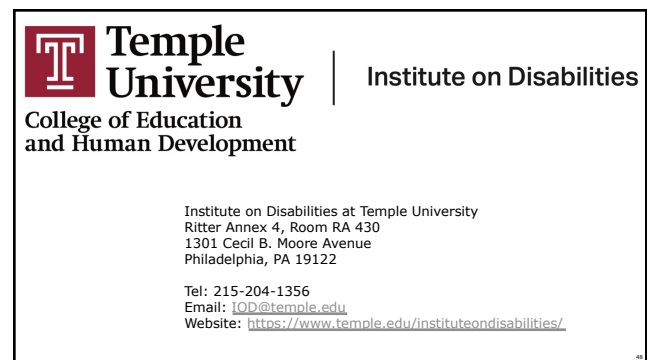
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Survey: <https://forms.office.com/r/unJmTEWEMR>

**PLEASE
COMPLETE THIS
SURVEY!**



Title: Consent AAC
Presenter: Hali Strickler

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**THANK YOU
FOR
ATTENDING!**

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