



Essential Features of a Defensible Autism Program

Module 5: Communication

OVERVIEW

The APERS 5th module, focuses on communication, which is a core area of need for autistic learners. It addresses the diverse communication needs of learners, and how communication rich environments can promote meaningful interactions and engagement. It also reviews how tailored instruction and responsive communication helps build student confidence and participation. It complete the module by looking at how accessible communication systems are used to ensure all students can express themselves and grow

THE PURPOSE

To guide educators in creating effective, inclusive communication supports for student with autism. It emphasizes building communication rich environments and uses intentional responsive strategies, to create meaningful interactions. It also helps teams ensure at all students have access to appropriate communication systems, so they can express their needs, participate in learning, and develop independence.



SUBDOMAINS

- Planning for Communication
- Communication Rich Environments
- Individualized communication
- Responsiveness to communication
- Communication Systems

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Assessment of communication needs

Look for evidence that communication needs are clearly assessed and documented, identifying how the student communicates their strengths, and areas of need

Opportunities to communicate with staff and peers

Students should have frequent, meaningful opportunities to communicate throughout the day and across settings. Both staff and peer interactions should be intentionally supported to encourage initiation, response, and social engagement.

Staff responsiveness to student communication

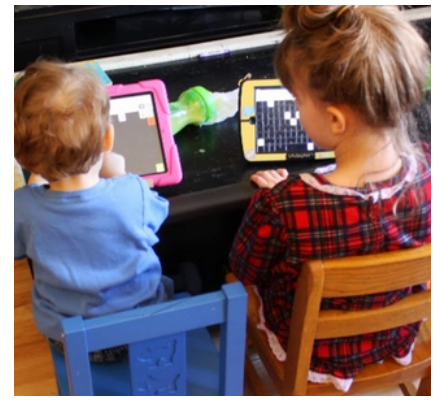
Staff should intentionally recognize and respond to all communication attempts in a timely and supportive manner. Responses should encourage continued communication, provide appropriate wait time, and promote independence rather than speaking for the student.

Specific instructions/interventions to promote communication

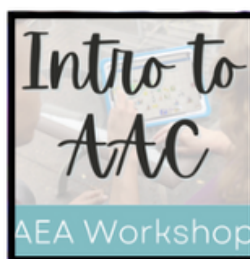
Clear, intentional strategies should be in place to teach and support communication skills. Instruction should be individualized, embedded into daily routines, and implemented across staff and environments

Use of augmented and alternative communication (AAC) systems

When appropriate, AAC systems should be accessible at all times and actively supported by all staff. Students should be encouraged and taught to use AAC in all settings, with consistent modeling and reinforcement to support effective communication



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



GET CONNECTED!



© PROJECT ACCESS - 2026
*PROJECT ACCESS IS A COLLABORATION AMONG THE MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY, AND MISSOURI'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS.