



STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

Internal Communique ■ Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled

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Basic Communicative Functions: Making Choices, Requesting, Getting Attention and Rejecting

This article is republished with permission from Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Connecting Young Kids (YAACK).

Making choices, requesting, getting the attention of an adult and rejecting something that is not wanted are among the first aims of a child's communication. These four functions give children control over their own lives. Besides increasing independence, they tend to decrease the incidence of behavior problems (Durand, 1993; Robinson & Owens Jr., 1995). They make excellent starting points in teaching communication because they are highly motivating and cognitively easy to understand. Furthermore, after the child has mastered them, they can, in turn, be used in teaching the child more advanced communication skills. Which to teach first should be determined by what is most motivating to the child. For some children it may be the ability to choose or request toys or food, or to get the attention of an adult; for others it may be to let a partner know that an object or activity is disliked. Of course, more than one function can be taught at the same time.

Sometimes there is the fear that a child will abuse these skills by requesting items or attention on a constant basis, or rejecting items and activities that are medically or physically necessary. However, there are proven techniques that can be used to teach the child to delay the need for immediate gratification and to tolerate activities and objects that are necessary but disliked.

In summary, a child needs to have these four communicative functions in his or her repertoire because:

- the inability to communicate in an appropriate manner may result in alternative ways of communicating that are destructive to self or others.
- these functions are the most logical communication skills with which to begin a teaching program since they are easily understood and highly motivating.
- moreover, the rewards for successfully communicating are immediate and natural. For example, the reward for being able to request for something is to get it.
- teaching these functions does not depend on the child understanding the use of symbols.
- these functions can be used to teach the child more advanced communication and communication-related skills such as symbols, new vocabulary, scanning or multiword phrases.
- these functions result in giving the child immediate power over his or her life. This reinforces the value of, and motivation to, continue learning.

For more information about this topic and for additional articles and resources, please visit the YAACK website at <http://aac.unl.edu:16080/yaack/index.html>. The YAACK website is divided into three sections: *How to get started*, *Choosing an AAC system* and *Teaching*. ♦

How to Build a Positive Parent-Professional Relationship that Benefits Everyone

This article is an excerpt from “Fostering Parent and Professional Collaboration,” produced by the Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers, and is reprinted with permission.

As the school year continues, it's important to remember the benefits of working together with mutual respect and shared knowledge.

Research confirms the positive benefits of parent-professional collaboration on the education of children with disabilities. In fact, good parent-professional partnerships benefit everyone involved: Parents and professionals have a more positive view of each other, parents become more involved with their children's education, and children with disabilities have more confidence and perform at higher levels.

Because parents and professionals bring different strengths to the collaboration, there are different ways for each to make the relationship positive and productive.

What professionals can do

In general, research has shown that what families want most from professionals is respect and acceptance. Professionals can help engage families in collaboration by:

- **Keeping promises and ensuring confidentiality:** Professionals can develop trust by telling the parents what information will be shared with others and what will be kept private, and by always asking permission to talk about their child with others. For new immigrants in particular, confidentiality for their child and themselves may be the most critical element in building a collaborative relationship.
- **Being hopeful and honest about a child's abilities and potential:** Professionals should not withhold information they presume might

be painful and should be willing to admit if they do not have answers to a parent's question. Sometimes families will have issues that professionals do not know how to address. It is then appropriate for the professional to connect the family with someone who may be helpful.

- **Helping parents identify their strengths:** Some parents truly do not understand that what they do on a daily basis is as important as formal services. Professionals can regularly point out where family interventions have been effective.
- **Helping parents identify choices:** School personnel can help families to identify the choices that are available to them, present options and solutions that might work, and encourage and support parents to make their own decisions.
- **Demonstrating and modeling problem-solving skills:** Professionals can demonstrate and model problem-solving skills and support parents to find creative solutions to their own problems.
- **Accepting parents as equal partners:** It is easier for professionals to bring parents into the system rather than the other way around because professionals have traditionally acted in a leadership role.
- **Being flexible and considerate of the parents' point of view:** Professionals can develop skills to shift their perspective from their specialty area to a broader perspective of the needs of the whole child and family.
- **Considering the family's preferences in aspects of planning:** Professionals should utilize the family's strengths while keeping in mind their challenges and other responsibilities.
- **Supporting parents as their child's best advocate in making decisions:** Some parents may need to be reminded that they are the decision-

makers for their child, and their input is valued.

- **Taking care of logistic details:** It is helpful when professionals are flexible in their time and location for meetings and services and when parents are assured that changes are possible.
- **Planning for parent involvement in systems change:** Professionals can encourage parent-professional collaboration by requesting that parents be invited to participate on committees to develop policies and procedures that address education and other relevant areas.

What parents can do

Parents can also take steps to build and maintain collaborative relationships with professionals by beginning with an assumption that professionals are doing the best they can for the child. Parents can contribute to the success of a collaborative relationship by:

- **Overtly recognizing the professional's commitment and expertise:** It is important for parents to acknowledge the skills of their children's teachers and service providers and recognize the commitment to meeting their child's needs.
- **Thanking the professionals that have been helpful to them:** It is not surprising that many times professionals go beyond the requirements of their job to help a family. It is important to recognize this effort and thank them when it occurs.
- **Considering that professionals are often limited by the systems in which they work:** Professionals may wish they could provide more help than they are able to offer, but it is not always within their ability to do so.

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How to Build a Positive Parent-Professional Relationship

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- **Reinforcing at home what a child is learning in school:** Children are aware of their parents' view of their school, teachers and other professionals. Parents should try to keep any conflict separate and keep their child's outlook positive.
- **Being flexible and considerate of the professional's point of view:** It is important to remember that no one understands the needs of a child with a disability in the same way parents do. Professionals cannot automatically understand what parents have learned from experience.
- **Being honest:** It is important that parents speak up when they do not understand what a professional

or team is saying to them. Parents sometimes fear losing face if they admit that they do not understand, while others fear that disagreement will lead to their child being punished. However, parents must understand the discussion to be effective advocates for their child and to express valid disagreements.

- **Following through with promises:** When a parent commits to an action, it becomes his or her responsibility to follow through. Collaboration is a two-way street, and trust flourishes when both parents and professionals follow through on agreements.
- **Committing to work to find solutions when disagreements arise:** It is inevitable that there will be times when parents and professionals disagree. For instance, does the child need an assessment, new glasses, allergy testing or shortened homework? Disagreements are

honest differences of opinion, not personal attacks. Effective parent collaborators commit to working on solutions.

- **Remembering that life is full of compromises:** Most parents fear what will happen if their child does not receive the right kind of services in the right amount and at the right time. However, each person faces compromises every day, and Individualized Education Program meetings are no exception. For instance, does a child need 40 minutes of direct speech or is indirect speech in the regular classroom more effective? Keeping the focus on outcomes will make compromises easier, systems accountable and collaboration more effective.

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Meet the New MSSD Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent

Archie Derboven

Archie Derboven was promoted to superintendent for Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled (MSSD) on June 3, 2010. He served as assistant superintendent for the past three years and has prior experience in public schools as a superintendent, building principal and classroom teacher.

Derboven's duties as assistant superintendent provided him a great deal of practice leading up to his current job. He was responsible for instruction, business, personnel and health services for MSSD.

His experience, both as a classroom teacher and school administrator, has enabled him to interact with special education students and their families to help students succeed in school and prepare for life after school.

He and his wife, Nancy, have four grown children (Patrick, Leslie, Julie and Mary Kay) and three grandchildren (Avery, Wade and Wesley). Derboven enjoys going to garage sales, reading and spending time with his grandkids.

Mary Wood

Mary Wood began her duties as assistant superintendent of MSSD on Aug. 16, 2010. She comes to our schools with experience in special education compliance, complemented by 10 years as a superintendent of schools, six years as director of a special education cooperative, and teaching experience in special education as well as regular education classrooms. Her experience as a speech pathologist and educational diagnostician in the public school setting provided opportunities for



her to work with children with severe disabilities and their parents.

Wood's true skills and interests have always been directed toward the area of special education, ensuring that all students are taught in a manner so that each one will achieve.

She is married and has two sons and two grandsons. Her interests outside of her profession are music, reading and traveling with her family. ♦

We wish Archie and Mary the best of luck!

Parkview Teacher Named One of the “Heartland’s Best”

Kathy Jones, a teacher at Parkview School, has been chosen as one of 12 Heartland’s Best Teachers by KFVS Channel 12 News in Cape Girardeau. The Heartland’s Best Teachers Award is for the southeast Missouri viewing area to honor teachers for their dedication to students. Winners are chosen by a panel of representatives from the major universities in the region who review the information from hundreds of nominations.

Jones has been teaching at Parkview for four years. She taught for four years in Bernie, Mo., and then worked at Bloomfield Elementary School for 22 years, teaching in both regular and special education classrooms. She resigned from her Bloomfield position for two years while she fought inflammatory breast cancer – she is

a survivor! After returning to work and “officially” retiring, Jones decided she actually wasn’t ready to give up teaching just yet. She began substitute teaching at several Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled before accepting a full-time teaching position at Parkview.

Jones graduated from Southeast Missouri State University with a degree in elementary education; she was certified for teaching students with learning disabilities and students who are mentally handicapped.

She lives in Bloomfield with her husband, Larry. They raised three children (two daughters and one son) and have been blessed with four grandchildren. Both of Jones’ parents are still living at the age of 91, and her spare time revolves around her family. As a breast cancer survivor, she has



Kathy Jones

been active in Relay for Life. She also is a member of the Missouri Retired Teachers Association and is active with Parkview’s PTO.

“Every day that I stand before children, I am challenged,” she said.

Jones said she wants to help all of her students become everything they can be and to let them know that they are all special. Her love for children shows in all of her interactions with students.

(To view the segment on her award, go to <http://www.kfvs12.com> and type “Kathy Jones” in the search window.) ♦



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Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Website: <http://dese.mo.gov/divspeced/stateschools>

NOTE: If you have items of interest for Staff Highlights, please call 573-751-0706, 800-735-2966 (Missouri Relay) or forward them to Debbie Stover, Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled, P.O. Box 480, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480; or send an e-mail to debbie.stover@dese.mo.gov.