

TAALC Communication Strategy #3:

Peer Mediated Supports

Introduction: Peers are essential to communication! Not only do students need something to say, but they need someone to say it to! As we design communication systems for students with complex communication needs, we must:

- design those systems with the idea that our students' primary communication partners should be their peers, and
- include topics that kids want to talk with each other about.

Peer mediated supports have been found to be more successful in increasing AAC use among students who use AAC than adult support alone (i.e., teacher, SLP). We want peers to communicate with the focus student through his/her communication system, which requires that peers understand how the focus student communicates.

Definition: Peer mediated supports are evidence based strategies that involve identifying and equipping a group of peers to provide ongoing support to students with significant disabilities in or outside of the classroom, supporting skill acquisition and/or increasing school participation. Two peer mediated support strategies that provide students with disabilities enhanced opportunities to learn from their peers, while broadening their social circles and fostering friendships are **Peer Networks and Peer Support Arrangements** (www.kypeersupport.org).

Peer Networks involve establishing a cohesive social group that meets formally and informally over time to create ongoing opportunities to enhance the social skills and peer relationships of an individual with a disability.

Peer support arrangements represent a practical, evidence-based approach for supporting inclusive learning opportunities for students with significant disabilities. Peer support



arrangements increase communication opportunities and decrease reliance on adult-delivered supports by creating well-supported, shared activities.

Implementation: An essential step in the implementation of peer networks and peer support arrangements, is the peer orientation. The information and strategies addressed during peer training sessions equip students for the specific activities and settings in which they will be interacting and providing support. For example, peers providing support in inclusive classroom settings will likely communicate within the context of on-going instruction and academic tasks, whereas peers involved in peer networks may focus more on encouraging social conversations within shared leisure activities. Each group of peers would benefit from more focused attention on targeted support strategies that enhance communication. It is important to **teach peers to use the student's communication system** as they interact, ask questions or make comments about topics of interest.

Teach peers to use communication strategies including:

- 1) Partner Assisted Scanning
- 2) Aided Language Modeling
- 3) Interpret and acknowledge
- 4) Wait with expectation

When identifying vocabulary to include in an AAC device, ask peers. They can provide age appropriate language for the student's device and/or suggestions for organizing the device.

Video Clip: In this video clip, <https://youtu.be/2oFktuuzhkh> Jaimar is meeting some peers for the first time. In this initial orientation meeting, the peers will tell some things about themselves and



Jaimar, with the support of his teacher, will help them understand how he communicates. Watch as Jaimar attempts to comment and ask questions. Notice how his teacher models for his communication partners how they can interpret what Jaimar is communicating and how he confirms or refutes that



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interpretation to let his communication partners know if they were correct.

Summary

Social relationships are of central importance in the lives of children and youth with significant disabilities — just as they are for any other student in your school. As educators and advocates, you play an important role in providing students the instruction, supports, and opportunities they need to increase their communicative competence and develop positive and satisfying relationships with their peers. The peer-mediated approaches described in this module provide many opportunities for students with significant disabilities to not only practice and use communication with natural supports, but also enhance their social lives. They also ensure other students in the school have the opportunity to meet, communicate, and enjoy friendships with important members of their school and community who are often overlooked.

Resources

KY Peer Support Network is a professional learning project focused on developing peer support networks and peer support arrangements in KY classrooms. <http://www.kypeersupport.org>

Video Clips provided the TAALC Project Teaching Age-appropriate Academic Learning through Communication (TAALC Project) at the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute supported by the Kentucky Department of Education.

References

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