

AAC Iceberg Framework

It is well established that Aided Language Stimulation, more commonly known as modelling, is best practice in teaching a person with complex communication needs (CCN) to understand and communicate expressively with AAC. For a student with CCN (also relevant to child or adult), it is the responsibility of the adult (e.g. parent/educator/support worker etc) to model words on the student's AAC system whilst speaking to them. This can assist the student to understand how words are used and consequently, use these words expressively.

The notion of an 'iceberg' relates to the idea that a student's communication skills are the 'tip of the iceberg'. Below the surface (represented as the line) are the hidden skills required of an adult that set the foundation for successful communicative behaviour of the student.

The AAC Iceberg Framework is designed to:

- Describe the impact of adult communicative behaviour in relation to the student's communicative behaviour
- Describe the development of adult modelling skills to teach a student to use AAC
- Assist adults to identify their current proficiency of modelling and the skills they need to acquire in order to maximise the student's communicative behaviour.

The framework presents a bottom-up approach in both individual and adult communicative behaviour for each targeted skill. That is, from novice (bottom) to proficient (top). Student and adult communicative behaviour relates to:

- the development of new words, phrases or sentences
- communication in varying environments
- general language and communicative behaviour

Experience has shown us that adults typically move from bottom to top as they become more knowledgeable and confident in their modelling skills. However, the stages of adult communicative behaviour are not equally weighted in its effect on student communication behaviour.

For example:

1. Adults model to students how to use **words the student will use** on their AAC in specific and structured sessions will have more effect on student communicative behaviour than adults become familiar with modelling through instructional use of language to students on their AAC systems.
2. Long periods focusing on Adults **identify** words to model and **practice finding** the words on the student's AAC system alone is unlikely to affect student communicative behaviour.

Therefore, adult communicative behaviours closer to the tip of the 'iceberg' (the line) are considered more effective in improving student communicative behaviour.

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