Aided language stimulation (Goossens’ et. al 1992) is a total immersion approach to teaching individuals to understand and use graphic symbols. It is intended to teach the student to use language in a very natural way that minimizes the need for structured training intervention and mimics the way natural speakers learn to comprehend language. Following the aided language stimulation approach, the communication partner highlights symbols on the student’s communication display as he or she interacts and communicates verbally with the student. As with typical language stimulation, the goal is not for the child to immediately repeat or imitate the skill, but rather to allow him/her to observe (hear and see) language being used, and to see how language can impact his/her world. Verbal labels and object-picture associations should be emphasized throughout the process to provide total communication support.

All too often, it is assumed that a child who is not speaking and not functionally using a communication tool should only have a small core vocabulary available. Rarely do communication partners consider providing access to vocabulary beyond simple nouns. Yet, developmentally it is known that by 15 months of age a toddler understands an average of 50 words. By 18 months they understand 150 to 500 different words (Chapman, 1978; Goossens’ 2001) and at the age of 12 to 18 months, the toddler understands four times as many words as s/he is able to produce (Griffiths, 1986, Goossens’ 2001). Additional research (Clark-Stewart 1993) has indicated that the language ability of the child between 9 and 13 months of age is not related to how responsive the environment is to the sounds produced, rather it is related to the total amount and variety of spoken input provided.

Potential strategies:

1. **Hand Held Strategy** (pull symbol off the facilitator’s board and show it while saying the target word) Since children under the age of 12-13 months do not readily understand the meaning of a distal pointing gestures, this strategy is often used with children below a 12 month level. Example, while singing the song “Five Little Ducks” the symbol for “Quack, Quack” is removed and prominently placed in the visual field of the student while the corresponding word is spoken.

2. **Facilitator Vest Strategy** (Speaker points to each target word attached to the vest as it is spoken). This strategy takes advantage of the emerging joint attention skills in young children and supports social referencing (checking back and forth between the speaker and the item being shared) by having the highlighted target and the communication partner together. This is a skill that children in the early 12 and 18 month range are typically developing.
3. **Facilitator Board Strategy** (Speaker points to symbols on the facilitator board as s/he speaks)  This strategy requires the student to understand a distal index finger point (early-mid 12 – 18 month skill)

4. **Student Expressive Communication Strategy** (Points out symbols on the child’s expressive communication system while speaking the target word(s). {Pictured: Using a flashlight to highlight symbols on the student’s communication display as you are speaking.}

**Resources:**
A wonderful resource for ideas and strategies for aided language stimulation is:
*Engineering the Preschool Environment for Interactive, Symbolic Communication*
by: Carol Goossens’, Sharon Sapp Crain and Pamela S. Elder
from: Southeast Augmentative Communication Conference Publications Clinicians Series
2430 11th Ave. N
Birmingham, AL 35234
1-619-550-0084