00:00.70
Sasha Long
Hi, Jessica. Thank you so much for joining me.

00:02.89
Jessica Alonso
Oh, thank you so much. I'm happy to be here.

00:05.32
Sasha Long
So I'm excited to talk about visuals and communication today. So tell me a little bit about your mini AAC boards because I love them. Tell me what they are and what gap were you trying to fill when you created these?

00:18.90
Jessica Alonso
Absolutely. So I created the mini AAC boards. They're small, portable picture communication boards that fit inside a badge holder or can be on a neck or a wrist lanyard. There are different inserts for everyday needs, emotional regulation, like a break card with calming strategies and location specific boards like the playground or a grocery store.

00:43.31
Jessica Alonso
The gap that I wanted to address was accessibility in those everyday moments. A child might need to say help or stop or I need a break while moving between activities. So having a small communication support nearby makes it easier to respond in that moment. It's not to replace an AAC device. It's more of like a companion to a child's full communication system.

01:08.24
Sasha Long
I love kind of that phrase, the companion to your full system, because in so many times in the day, you know, the hallway, the bathroom, the playground, we might not have the iPad out there with us.

01:12.44
Jessica Alonso
Mm hmm.

01:20.35
Sasha Long
Or if we do, it's not like. up on the top of the playground by the slide, right?

01:24.53
Jessica Alonso
Yes.

01:26.31
Sasha Long
and then our kids are at a loss and you know I'm sure we've all seen firsthand how that you know, can cause problem behavior and struggles and challenges for our kids when they don't have a way to communicate.

01:36.99
Sasha Long
in these meaningful times, like on top of the slide.

01:40.88
Jessica Alonso
Definitely. So I've noticed that as me when I was in RBT. So i when I was in RBT, we didn't really have... aac it was more pecs and So this was something new to me.

01:53.70
Jessica Alonso
And having that there with me at that time would have been so beneficial because I mean sometimes the AAC device could be uncharged. or it's in a different room.

02:04.36
Jessica Alonso
So having it there at that specific time would have been so beneficial to me.

02:08.90
Sasha Long
Yes. Well, and i I see a common problem in classrooms, and I'm sure you see this too, where there is a device or there is a textbook or there is a core board, whatever there is, but that system is in the backpack. And you know the kid gets unpacked, they get settled in the day, and you know people classes are overcrowded, they're understaffed, so no one gets that device out of the backpack.

02:30.27
Sasha Long
And. then our kids kind of stuck all day. So what strategies do you have for teachers that are like, oh my gosh, this is me. We forget to get it out until 11 o 'clock in the morning.

02:39.11
Jessica Alonso
Yeah, so I think a lot of times teachers think even that that AAC is something to pull out even during like a specific lesson or it's been, you know, no set plan on how to use it. But communication happens throughout the day. So if a child has to wait for someone to find their board, we've already added a barrier. So I'd encourage teachers

to build access into every transition. Where is the system? Can the student reach and use it? Does the next adult know how to support it?

03:07.94
Jessica Alonso
So being nearby isn't enough. We also have to notice and respond when the child communicates. That was one of the reasons why I created the mini AAC board, for them to have another accessible way to communicate.

03:21.40
Jessica Alonso
in those moments so if the device for like what i said it was not charged or at another desk or left in another room the child could still communicate with a small accessible board on a neck or a wrist lanyard

03:34.57
Sasha Long
I love that because Again, even it the the charging is such a big thing. I mean, you'd think it wouldn't.

03:38.64
Jessica Alonso
Yeah.

03:40.85
Sasha Long
be but man logistics rule the world like if there's one charger and the charger is at home or at school and it comes back dead You know, that kid doesn't wake up on that Tuesday and is like, well, I don't have to say anything today. It's like they don't even have the opportunity.

03:52.86
Jessica Alonso
Mhm. agree.

03:55.21
Sasha Long
So in scenarios where, let's say, a child gets 30 minutes, 60 minutes a week of, you know, push in therapy with a speech pathologist. that there could be a mentality of a newer teacher or the structure of like, this is when they use their AAC during their 30-minute block of speech. But in reality, we know it should be used throughout the whole day.

04:14.89
Sasha Long
In your head, what does a very successful day look like for a student

who's primarily an AAC communicator? How is this incorporated throughout their whole day?

04:25.93
Jessica Alonso
To me, it looks like giving the student something to say beyond answering classroom questions. So at lunch, that might be open, different, or I don't like that. At recess, it could be my turn, play with me, or stop. So adults... have to they have to model these words while talking naturally then give the student time to respond you know, um sometimes that's the thing.

04:51.67
Jessica Alonso
We want them to say it so bad that we end up saying it for them.

04:55.39
Sasha Long
Yes.

04:55.49
Jessica Alonso
So. every interaction doesn't need to be a test and that was something that I had to tell myself um all the time because I would constantly say you know what's this where's that or or I like that and it's sometimes that it's like you got to give them a chance to to do it themselves. There should be room for conversation, room for opinions, for jokes, and for connecting with their friends, with their family.

05:20.97
Sasha Long
I love that because. Especially, you know, my first interactions like back in the day when I started in a self-contained classroom was learning the PEC system and that it's all built around those just like initial I want this and answering questions. But if you can think broader of like, can we comment? Can we greet? There's so much more that's involved.

05:41.18
Sasha Long
in holistic communication.

05:43.24
Jessica Alonso
definitely like give them some time to you know make a joke you know give them an opinion you know they have so much things that they want to say and

05:48.26
Sasha Long

Yes.

05:52.79
Jessica Alonso
only on that like little core board you know you can't just base it off on only those little pictures that they have there's just so much more

06:01.30
Sasha Long
So when you're thinking about that smaller board that... is kind of that backup in those kind of you know transition scenarios or if the AAC device is somewhere else and a teacher's like, okay, I love this. How do they prioritize what can go on that smaller communication system? What things are kind of the most important for them to readily have access to?

06:23.74
Jessica Alonso
So I think. By thinking about what the student might want to communicate in that specific situation, like useful words might include help, stop, no, alongside words specific to that activity.

06:36.68
Jessica Alonso
So I want options for refusing, for commenting, or asking for support. So not only requesting for things. I think the size of a board doesn't tell us the size of a child's vocabulary or what they understand.

06:51.26
Jessica Alonso
So if the message isn't on the mini AAC board, that doesn't... doesn't mean we need to help them access. That means that we need to help them access more language. They shouldn't have to prove they've mastered a few pictures before getting access.

06:59.83
Sasha Long
Mm hmm.

07:04.63
Jessica Alonso
to a fuller system.

07:06.44
Sasha Long
Yeah, that's a good point. And thinking about... you know I always worry about with a bigger core board that it's... sometimes too overwhelming and too much scanning but I think that process like you were saying of like prioritizing what's we're using in that part of

the classroom or part of the day can help alleviate that.

07:26.70
Jessica Alonso
Mhm. Yeah, that's why I made also interchangeable inserts for specific locations like going to the playground or the library and then they can quickly just switch off the board and it kind of revolves around that specific.

07:42.54
Jessica Alonso
situation or activity that they're doing.

07:45.64
Sasha Long
I like also that this model and program is going to push for communication outside of the classroom. Like, you know, in the classroom, everything's safe and structured. but At.

07:56.05
Sasha Long
The grocery store, at the playground, when we're interacting with members of our school and our community, we can then use our alternative method of communication there. And I love the idea you have about your emergency contact card. contact card can you talk a little bit about what that looks like i know it's hard on a podcast we're not visual here but where that came from and what what that accomplishes

08:15.87
Jessica Alonso
Yeah, so um this was a free resource that I gave to my newsletter subscribers. So the idea actually came from a personal experience um with my three-year-old. So we were at Chuck E. Cheese um with a friend and her and her kids. And my daughter decided to walk off without telling me. And I was focused on my one-year-old for a brief minute. And when I look over, she was gone.

08:38.85
Jessica Alonso
So immediately I was into full panic mom mode. And about five seconds later, a woman walked over with her and she told me she asked my daughter like.

08:49.31
Jessica Alonso
okay, so what's your mom's name? And my daughter said, mom. And I'm thinking, okay, yes, but that's not going to help her find me. So that's where the emergency contact card came from.

09:01.16
Jessica Alonso
And the card gives that person a starting point. So I communicate differently. Here's how you can support me. Here's who to contact. And I think that this is something families should consider as part of their safety plan because there's a lot of track runner elopers out there.

09:16.22
Jessica Alonso
Okay, so it's...

09:16.21
Sasha Long
Yes. For sure.

09:18.67
Jessica Alonso
Yeah. And I feel like it's so important because. you know At that moment, and you know I was thinking, even when I was in RBT, and i and i I remember this vividly, running with my BCBA in the middle of a neighborhood, running after a 10-year-old, and he was a track star. And I'm thinking what happens if.

09:38.74
Jessica Alonso
I can't see him any anymore. What happened? where What do I do?

09:42.41
Sasha Long
Yeah.

09:42.58
Jessica Alonso
And. So... It's scary.

09:45.57
Sasha Long
And the. Yeah, no, it's definitely scary. And, any you know, I'm not ah a parent to a child with special needs, so I i can't even imagine. the stress that goes through your head of a kid with you know, maybe minimal expressive verbal language.

09:59.94
Sasha Long
And yeah, if you were to, God forbid, we never, of course, went back to heaven, but get lost or you blink for a second and they run away and and then not having those tools even to verbally communicate.

10:06.97

Jessica Alonso
Mm hmm.

10:11.04
Sasha Long
So I think that's a great, you know, suggestion. and and And a good kind of starting off point for teachers to reach out to parents and talk about. I like how a lot of these strategies like.

10:22.59
Sasha Long
the emergency contact card and even the mini AAC is so

10:26.46
Sasha Long
it's easy like this is something we can talk with parents and caregivers about we can make for the home you know the big complicated tech devices can be overwhelming at first so this feels like a nice entry point to those conversations about safety plan plans about communication systems that can bridge the homeschool connection. Can you talk to me a little bit about how teachers and school staff can kind of work with families so the communication system is consistent? Like things we're using at school are also things they're using at home.

10:58.40
Jessica Alonso
Yeah, so starting with one shared conversation with the student's preferences at the center. So what are they already communicating? What matters at home?

11:07.75
Jessica Alonso
Where are communication breakdowns happening at school? So the SLP brings AAC and language expertise, right? So the teacher knows classroom routines and the BCBA can contribute with their behavioral expertise. And the family knows the child in everyday life. So to agree on a few practical things, how the system stays accessible, how can we be consistent? How are we modeling it? And how do they respond to these messages? So consistency means that the child's communication is understood and respected. So I recently.

11:41.53
Jessica Alonso
I recently posted on Instagram talking about a popular opinion saying SLPs and ABA should work together and not compete. And I was actually so surprised by the amount of SLPs and BCBAs commenting. saying that there's a huge lack of collaboration, a lot of pushback.

11:59.85

Jessica Alonso
And they were talking about ego and my intervention you know i've heard about a lot about that that my intervention is better you know i and the There is a big factor in a child's progress. and if there's no collaboration goals are harder to reach.

12:16.87
Sasha Long
a Yeah, 1000%. that collaboration being between the team at school and that team. between school and home is so, so essential, as you said.

12:29.60
Sasha Long
So thinking through kind of. the obstacles that can be there for AAC. And I like that you're kind of mini AC board can help with some of those obstacles, you know, not having it charged, not having it available, bringing it to the all the places. For a teacher that's newer to special ed or that's newer to this field that maybe has several students with ipads or high-tech devices what's kind of one action step a teacher could do right now to...

12:55.48
Sasha Long
work with their families on AAC use and kind of streamlining this process.

13:01.37
Jessica Alonso
I think families already have a lot on their plates. So I think a useful example built into their routine can be more helpful than another like packet of homework. So asking the family, what's one message?

13:15.29
Jessica Alonso
Your child wants to communicate at home that we can help support at school. And then working with the SLP, working with the BCBA on a practical way. to support it and share a quick example of how you're modeling it. Because I feel like that's so important. Parents, you know, we use these terminologies of, oh, you have to tact and you have to man and and all this stuff. And it's kind of overwhelming. and they They need that.

13:40.01
Jessica Alonso
hand over hand too sometimes.

13:41.75
Sasha Long
Mm hmm.

13:42.50
Jessica Alonso
Yeah, and making it. Maybe it's asking a sibling to play or saying something hurts or choosing a different activity. We work on that. together.

13:51.54
Sasha Long
I like how that... Picks an example that the parents suggest, not something we suggest for them.

13:56.64
Jessica Alonso
Definitely. So we. oh go ahead

13:59.00
Sasha Long
Oh, no, you go. You'll go.

14:00.50
Jessica Alonso
so definitely I see that a lot so sometimes you know we create an intervention and we're not even asking the parents first before. And we go in there already with the intervention made, hey, we're going to do this, this, this, and that. And the parents are still working on having the kid ask for help.

14:16.61
Jessica Alonso
you know, and

14:17.37
Sasha Long
Yeah.

14:17.92
Jessica Alonso
That's so important to have their. opinion, their feedback. first before creating a plan.

14:24.83
Sasha Long
And you're going to get that motivation right there from them because they see it as a problem not or a challenge, not us seeing it as that problem or challenge. And then we get to. hopefully come in with some ideas for solutions and solutions that align with things that we're doing in the class.

14:39.71

Jessica Alonso
Absolutely.

14:41.61
Sasha Long
with things like visuals for communication as well as other behavior visuals in the classroom are there any common mistakes you see with visual supports in the room obviously there's tons and tons of information about different types of visuals on Pinterest, everywhere you look, but Are there any so missteps that you see happening?

15:00.05
Jessica Alonso
I think the mistake I highlight is putting visuals up and assuming that the child automatically knows what they mean or how to use them. So I remember going into a classroom and it was filled. with visuals and sometimes it's just too much.

15:15.45
Jessica Alonso
And. We automatically assume that they know what they mean. I think a visual support needs to be introduced and used with the student. A communication board needs adults to model it and to respond to it. We need to check whether the pictures, the size, the placement, is it overstimulating? you know, too many things, the amount of information.

15:36.84
Jessica Alonso
It has to be. con Condensed I think is that the word?

15:40.93
Sasha Long
Yeah.

15:41.68
Jessica Alonso
for, you know, for that specific learner. And I'd look at the purpose, you know, are the visuals helping the student understand, you know, make choices, communicate, and are they able to advocate for themselves? Because if we only use them to tell to tell children what to do.

15:57.91
Jessica Alonso
We're missing so much of their value.

16:00.58
Sasha Long
yeah I totally agree I see yes beautiful classrooms there's but there's just too much and then it kind of the important things get

lost

16:08.43
Sasha Long
And I think that's what, you know, I found your your information originally on Instagram. And what I loved about some of the tools you were sharing, like those mini AAC boards, is it was prioritized. It was like, these are the most important things we need. This isn't like a 25, you know, clip thing where all these different systems and images. It was like, hey, these are the few images that you might really need at recess. And let's put it in an accessible way that you can actually bring it with you to recess.

16:34.76
Jessica Alonso
Yes. Definitely. That's exactly why I created it because, you know, Coming from the ABA side, I was so used to the packs. And then when I see AAC, you know, These kids have these huge devices with, yes, they have some icons that can be used for playground, but then they have icons for other things while they're at the playground. And it could kind of be a little too much at that moment.

16:57.71
Jessica Alonso
so i'm thinking that condensing it into you know

16:57.87
Sasha Long
Yeah.

17:00.77
Jessica Alonso
depending on the learner. But I mean, I only have experience with early intervention, but. with the six icons you know of just playground specific icons. It can help so much more.

17:12.10
Sasha Long
I love it. So where can people go to see some of your tools, what they look like? Because on a podcast, you really don't get the whole whole picture here. Where can people go to learn more from you?

17:21.58
Jessica Alonso
Yeah, so you can find me at minimeprintable .com and Instagram the same minimeprintable. I share practical ideas for using AAC and visual supports in everyday life. And I also have a newsletter on my website for tips and free resources every single month.

17:38.57

Sasha Long
Awesome. Thank you so much, Jessica.

17:40.31
Jessica Alonso
Thank you so much for having me