**Getting Started with PODD: Advice from Mary-Louise for your first six weeks with your new PODD**

When it all seems overwhelming, it means our expectations that we have put on ourselves are too much at the moment. When I am supporting families and teams to start out with PODD I am very firm about a few things…

1.  Relax and accept that this is new, is not natural, does not feel natural and is not innate. Relax. Breathe. Show everyone where the Ooops button is and teach them how to use it. It is there for a reason. It is ok to make mistakes. We are ALL learning.

2.  Everyone is learning. The only people that can train someone on using the PODD is the person that has been to training or the person who is leading the implementation (and this CAN be the parent). If an issue comes up and someone wants to correct another person's use of the system this is not to be done in front of the child. The Implementation Leader can be contacted for advice on how to handle /use the system correctly and they will address the issue. (This stops the I think you do this/She said you do it this way/that's the wrong way arguments)

3.  The ONLY goal for the first 2 weeks is that you problem solve how to carry the communication system with you EVERYWHERE. You don't have to use it but I do expect you to carry it absolutely everywhere. This is the time for problem solving how this will happen. Will you have a strap? Will it have a stand? Will you have a few copies? Have the motto - "See the child, See the AAC/PODD". Get everyone on the team to support each other and remind each other in FRIENDLY ways if they don't see the PODD with the child. Make a pledge to carry it everywhere and to not be offended when someone reminds you to take the PODD (as long as they do it in a friendly and agreed upon manner).

4.  By now it is week 3 and you may have sneakily used the PODD to model something and you are feeling pretty cool because you are ahead of the schedule (this is important because remember that three weeks ago everyone was freaking out and feeling overwhelmed and looking at that GIANT book and thinking OH MY GOSH!!!?). I now tell you that your goals for the next two weeks are to model and use ONLY pages 1a and 1b (core vocab/ chat words). Lots of opportunity to model, 'look', 'me', 'my turn', 'your turn', 'hurry up', 'I love you' etc. You may even start combining words! "help me", "uh oh, I help", "please, don't touch".

    By now you are firmly establishing the habit of taking the PODD/AAC with you wherever you go and you are modelling in a variety of situations. You want more! You ask me if you can do more! I say of course you can! You are feeling like, "dang girl, I got this thing!" Woohoo!

5.  Now I suggest you focus on one or two branch starters to model - remember we have NO expectation that the child will be using the system at this point. The first YEAR of intervention is about us providing receptive input. If the child/adult with Complex Communication Needs (CCN) uses it to communicate that is fantastic but it is not our primary goal. Remember how long we expose typical children to speech before we expect them to say their first words? Well, we are giving this child with CCN the same opportunity but we are exposing them to a year of receptive input of a language that they can use to communicate expressively. Keep reminding the team of this. People might be starting to ask, "but when is she going to use it? how much longer do we need to do this before she says something?"

So now you may wish to choose a branch starter like "I like this" or "I don't like this" and start modeling comments. Or you may model 'Something's wrong' if your child is sick. I try to avoid the "I'm telling you something" at this stage because if school staff use this they seem to get stuck at "I'm telling you something, it's time for...". We need to remind adults that we want to model CHILD language and things that the child may want to say. Once a teacher has discovered the "it's time for...." it is often hard for him/her to shift back to child focused language.

6. So now it is about 5 or 6 weeks in and you are taking the system everywhere, you are super familiar with the vocabulary on 1a and 1b (1b often gets forgotten so remember to look there!), you are feeling comfortable with things and you have a few questions and queries and want to learn more and do more. You are probably sitting up at night with the PODD / AAC and following pathways and exploring the vocab. You may be adding things to lists. You may be using 'PODD-talk' which is where you use the language structure of the PODD book but without having it in your hands eg you are carrying your child from the bath to the change table and you kiss him and say, "turn the page, I love you" or when you are putting your child in his carseat and a loud motorbike goes past and your child is super excited, "Wow!, More to say, I like this, favourite. Motorbikes are your favourite aren't they?". You may even find yourself muttering to your partner, "More to say, I don't like this, boring" as you hear him change the TV channel to ESPN...

   Everyone needs to feel success and by breaking the intervention down into chunks we can support those adults who we know are going to just love it, and also those adults who we just know are going to struggle.

7. I like to meet everyone again about this point to talk about successes, challenges, vocabulary needed, and how the child is attending to or using the system (if at all, remember this is not a goal yet). We practice more modeling, refine technique, and remember that this should be relaxed, fun, and casual. The moment we stress out and start expecting the child to watch and wait while we try to remember the pathway then we have lost it. We also need to remind everyone that the Ooops button is there for a reason! USE it! Model it! The only way the child learns that it is ok to make mistakes and have a go is if he or she sees us do this too.