

ADAPTING AAC TRAINING TO IMPACT COMMUNICATION PARTNERS

Key Takeaways — Confidence • Cues • Cycle of Change

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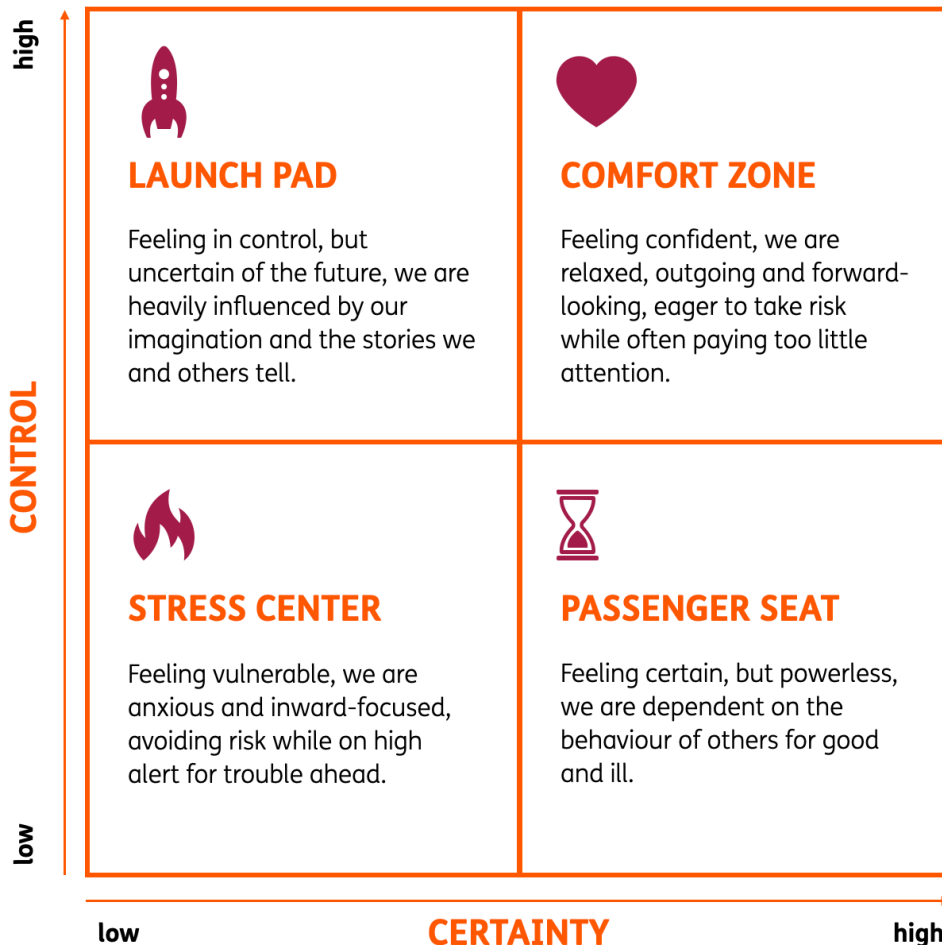
The Confidence Map (Peter Atwater, *The Confidence Map: Charting a Path from Chaos to Clarity*)

Confidence depends on two factors:

- **Control** – feeling prepared, capable, and equipped with skills and resources.
- **Certainty** – feeling that things are predictable and understandable.

Four states of confidence:

- **Comfort Zone:** high control + high certainty → confidence, openness, ease.
- **Launch Pad:** high control + low certainty → innovation, imagination, readiness to act.
- **Passenger Seat:** low control + high certainty → dependence, waiting for others to act.
- **Stress Center:** low control + low certainty → vulnerability, anxiety, withdrawal

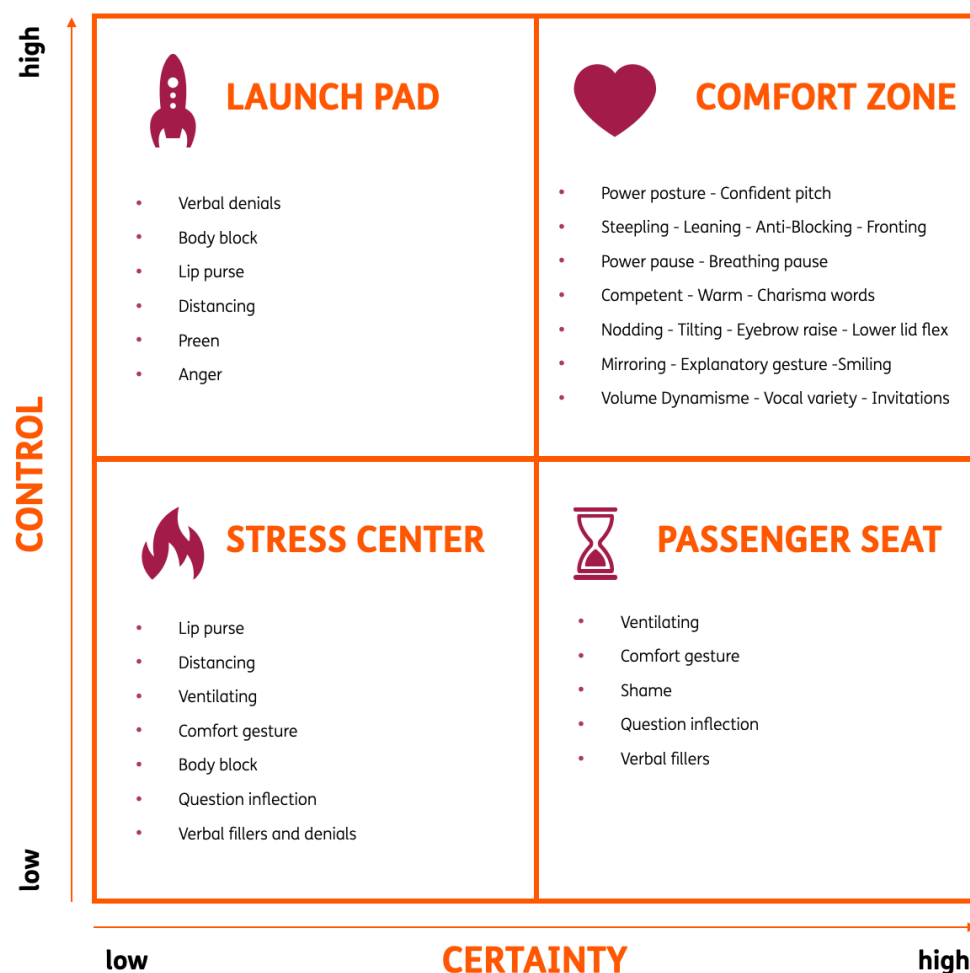


When we understand how feelings of control and certainty influence someone's readiness to accept and use AAC we can tailor our supports to meet emotional as well as practical needs. Matching strategies to each confidence state builds trust, motivation, and follow-through. In doing so, we help move them from confusion and hesitation toward confidence.

Cues (Vanessa Van Edwards, Cues: Small Signals, Incredible Impact)

Every interaction sends cues that reveal confidence and readiness:

- **Warm cues** – nodding, smiling, mirroring, vocal warmth → build trust and connection.
- **Competent cues** – posture, gesture, clarity, volume control → project capability.
- **Charisma cues** – leaning in, open body language, confident pitch → inspire engagement.
- **Danger-zone cues** – distancing, lip pursing, filler words → signal stress or resistance.



By learning to read and use cues, you become more aware of others' emotions and reactions. This awareness builds trust and stronger connections. It also helps you express confidence and warmth — key skills for effective leadership and positive communication.

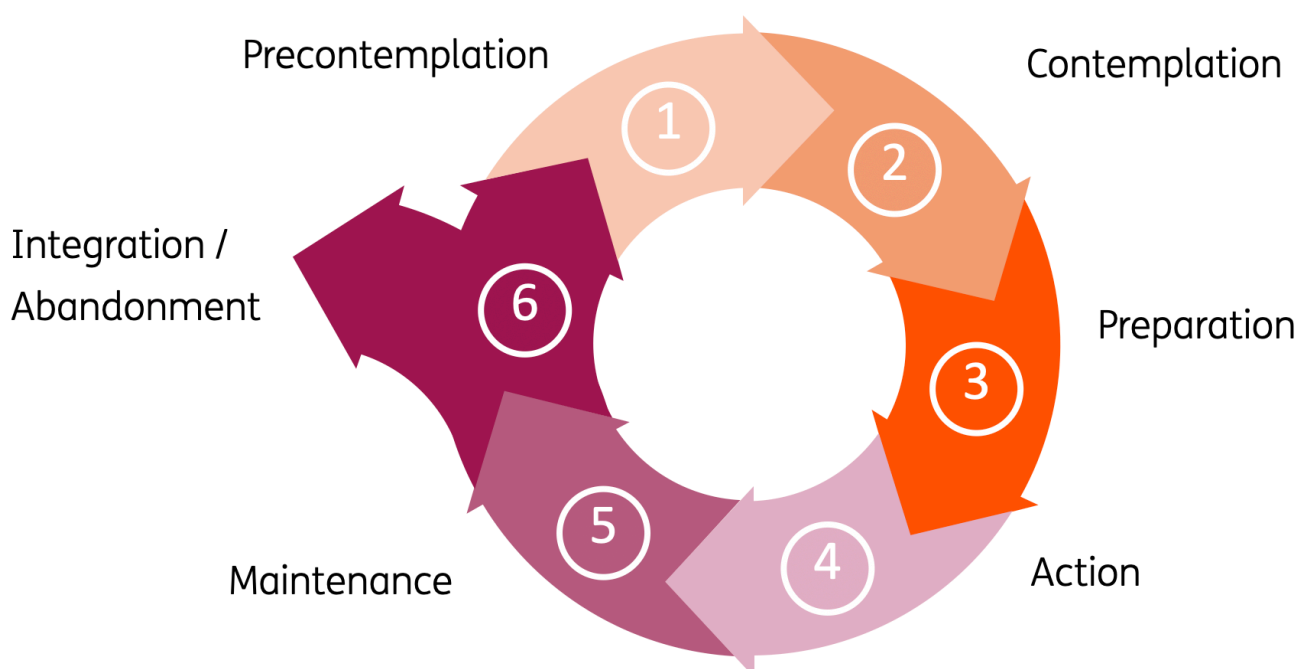
The Cycle of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, *Transtheoretical Model of Change*)

Change happens through stages: Precontemplation → Contemplation → Preparation → Action → Maintenance → Integration/Abandonment.

The Cycle of Change helps us see that change isn't a single step but an ongoing process of learning, practicing, and adjusting. Families and teams often begin unaware that change is needed, then grow curious, start planning, take action, and work to maintain new habits. Over time, AAC either becomes a natural part of communication or fades without continued support. Each stage brings different feelings—from uncertainty to confidence—and calls for a different kind of help. When we meet people where they are in the cycle, we can guide them forward with empathy and confidence.

Strategies and Supports:

- Precontemplation → Listen and observe. Share success stories.
- Contemplation → Validate curiosity. Offer a small, concrete next step.
- Preparation → Co-create a plan with visual or written tools.
- Action → Coach and encourage. Troubleshoot in real time.
- Maintenance → Celebrate wins. Plan for challenges.
- Integration/Abandonment → Affirm identity. Re-engage gently if needed.



Putting It All Together

When we understand how feelings of control and certainty shape a person's readiness to accept and use AAC, we can tailor our support to meet both emotional and practical needs. Using the **confidence map** helps us recognize how partners feel, **cues** guide how we build safety and trust, and the **cycle of change** shows what kind of support is needed next. Together, these frameworks build trust, motivation, and follow-through — helping partners move from confusion and hesitation toward confidence.

Use the **confidence map** to gauge how partners feel, **cues** to communicate safety and trust, and the **cycle of change** to guide what kind of support they need next. Together, these frameworks create confident, motivated partners who can sustain meaningful AAC growth.

How to Support Each Stage of Change

Stage	Emotional State (Confidence Map)	Helpful Cues	Strategies & Supports
1. Precontemplation	Low control, low certainty → Stress Center	Low control, low certainty → Stress Center	Listen first. Share small success stories. Model AAC without pressure.
2. Contemplation	Low control, growing certainty → Passenger Seat	Warm + competent cues	Validate feelings. Offer examples. Provide a small next step.
3. Preparation	High control, moderate certainty → Launch Pad	Competent cues	Co-plan goals. Give structure. Encourage follow-through.
4. Action	High control, low certainty → Struggle Zone	Warm + competent cues	Normalize effort. Troubleshoot together. Celebrate progress.
5. Maintenance	High control + high certainty → Comfort Zone	Competent cues	Reinforce success. Plan ahead. Encourage peer sharing.
6. Integration / Abandonment	Shifting between Comfort and Stress	Warm cues	Affirm identity. Reconnect with empathy if use declines.

Stress center	Natural response	Support Strategies	Competent cues	Danger zone cues	Warm cues	Charisma cues	Change cycle
Comfort zone 	● Fantastic ● Flashy ● Futuristic ● Festive ● Frenetic	● Less support needed ● Be aware of leaving the comfort zone	● Power posture ● Lower lid flex ● Steepling ● Explanatory gesture ● Volume Dynamism ● Power pause ● Competent words		● Nodding ● Tilting ● Eyebrow raise ● Smiling ● Mirroring ● Vocal variety ● Vocal invitations ● Warm words	● Leaning ● Anti-blocking ● Fronting ● Confidence pitch ● Breathing pause ● Charisma words	● Precontemplation ● Integration or Abandonment
Stress center 	● Fight ● Flight ● Follow ● Freeze ● F*ck it	● Immediate ● Complete ● Realistic ● Simple ● Authentic		● Lip purse ● Distancing ● Ventilating ● Comfort gesture ● Body block ● Question inflection ● Verbal fillers and denials			● Contemplation ● Integration or Abandonment
Launch pad 	● Feeling in control ● Uncertain about the future ● Influenced by imagination or stories	● Acknowledge the unknown ● Embrace uncertainty ● Develop ability to adapt and change ● Create clear roadmap ● Reflect on what truly drives you		● Verbal denials ● Body block ● Lip purse ● Distancing ● Preen ● Anger			● Preparation ● Action
Passenger seat 	● Do as we are told ● Someone else can solve our "problem" ● Call in the expert	● Acknowledge vulnerability ● Cultivate a growth mindset ● Set clear goals ● Focus on action		● Ventilating ● Comfort gesture ● Shame ● Question inflection ● Verbal fillers			● Preparation ● Action

References

- Atwater, P. (2023). *The Confidence Map: Charting a Path from Chaos to Clarity*. HarperCollins.
- Van Edwards, V. (2022). *Cues: Small Signals, Incredible Impact*. Portfolio/Penguin.
- Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1983). Stages and Processes of Self-Change in Smoking: Toward an Integrative Model of Change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 51(3), 390–395.