

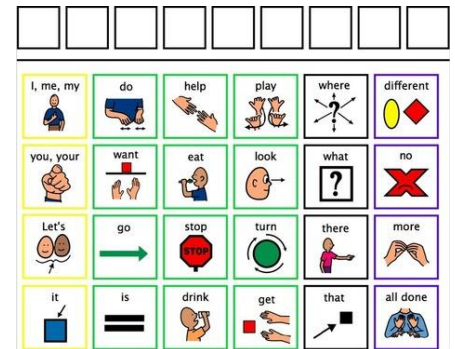
Augmentative and Alternative Communication: AAC

What is AAC?

Augmentative and Alternative Communication simply means communicating in a form other than speech. The goal of an AAC system is to give an individual effective communication to maximize quality of life.

There are various types of AAC that can be chosen depending on the individual's skill level and communication needs. AAC systems are either unaided or aided. Unaided systems use your body only (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, sign language). Aided systems require use of some material or tech device. These can be low-tech in that the user points to pictures or words (e.g., Picture Exchange Communication System [PECS], communication boards). Some low-tech devices are still electronic, such as a talking photo album or a 'switch' button, which will say certain words or phrases aloud when pressed. There are also high-tech speech-generating systems (SGD) such as apps for an iPad or computer (e.g., Proloquo2Go or TouchChat) or dedicated devices (e.g. Tobi Dynavox or Sattilo).

The speech language pathologist will help determine the most effective type of AAC based on the needs and abilities of the individual.



Myths about AAC

- ***AAC will keep my child from talking.***
No! Communication skills can be learned simultaneously with speech skills. Research shows that AAC does *not* hinder speech production.¹
- ***AAC is not for children who can speak some words.***
No! AAC can be used in conjunction with speaking. If speech is the easiest way to communicate, a child will use that first. AAC is most helpful for situations in which an individual cannot use speech to meet *all* of their communication needs. It's important to consider their communication in daily living. If there is a struggle to communicate with someone who is not familiar with the person's speech, AAC may help meet the communication needs.
- ***A low-tech tool should be used prior to a high tech device.***
Not necessarily! If the individual could benefit from what the high tech device provides, such as speech repeated aloud or the ability to instantaneously update and change the system, this could be a valuable starting point. Learning to navigate a high tech device is similar to learning how to walk- we always have the "equipment" (legs), but it takes a bit of skills strengthening before reaping the full benefit of the equipment.²
- ***We should wait in case speech develops later!***



No! AAC should not be seen as a 'last resort'. Instead, it is a useful tool to encourage language and vocabulary development. AAC can help a child more easily communicate with others, whereas a lack of functional communication methods may lead to frustration and negative behaviors. It is also difficult to know if a child will develop speech in the future, and without effective means of communication, a child may be at risk for cognitive, social or emotional problems.

Tips for AAC Communicators and Partners

- Communication partners should also be familiar with how to use the AAC system and able to model use of the system³
- Be responsive to and acknowledge communicative attempts³
- Communication partners should leave an expectant pause. Wait 10-20 seconds to allow the AAC user an opportunity to communicate.
- Communication partners can encourage language expansion by using the +1 rule, or modeling one additional word than the user is producing with the AAC device. If one word is typically used, add a word to make a 2-word phrase and speak the phrase verbally while using the device.
- As an AAC user, practice across various activities and environments and allow time to explore the system. Practice with communication partners as well!

Additional Information

For AAC users:

- A helpful guide for finding, using, and communicating with an AAC system
<https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/Information-for-AAC-Users/>

For Providers:

- Info about different systems, populations who use AAC, treatment, etc.
https://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589942773§ion=Key_Issues
- These Core First pagesets provide some beginning storybooks to start with.
<https://www.tobiidynavox.com/en-US/software/content/core-first/#CoreFirstLearning>
- The Northwest Augmentative Communication Society advocates for and provides informative resources around augmentative communication.
<https://www.nwacs.info/>

For teachers and parents:

- Info about helping introduce a system to a child and modeling the use of the system
<https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/teach-your-child-to-use-an-aac-device/>

Resources

- 1) Schlosser, R. W., & Wendt, O. (2008). Effects of augmentative and alternative communication intervention on speech production in children with Autism: A systematic review. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 17, 212-230.
- 2) AAC Myths Revealed. (2016) Retrieved from <http://tdvox.web-downloads.s3.amazonaws.com/MyTobiiDynavox/td-myths-low-before-high.pdf>.

- 3) Kent-Walsh, J., & McNaughton, D. (2005). Communication partner instruction in AAC: Present practices and future directions, augmentative and alternative communication. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 21(3), pp. 195-204. DOI: 10.1080/07434610400006646