

Alternative & Augmented Communication (AAC)

When communication is difficult, a spoken message can be enhanced using AAC.

AAC makes communication easier, and can help a person to:

- Express themselves without using words
- Understand spoken words
- Understand the world around them
- Understand what is expected
- Understand and accept change
- Increase independence
- Move from one activity to another or to different places
- Learn new skills
- Learn abstract concepts such as sequence
- Establish and maintain attention

What does AAC look like?

AAC looks like anything that adds information to spoken words and enhances a message.

AAC can be aided, for example:

- Visual aids (supports)
- Communication books or boards
- Electronic or non-electronic aids
- Everyday signs and symbols such as toilet signs or the McDonalds logo
- Calendars

AAC can also be unaided, for example:

- Body language and tone of voice
- Key Word Sign and natural gesture
- Behaviour
- Facial expression
- Environmental cues
 - The way the room is set up, for example, when the cushions are on the floor it is mat time
 - when the microwave goes ping it is hot drink time
 - people - when mum shows up it means it's time to go home



What are symbols?

Symbols are icons that represent something (a word, an object or a concept).

Symbols can be:

- Real objects
- Miniature objects
- Parts of objects
- Logos
- Photos
- Colour or black and white line drawings
- Written words

Why does AAC work?

- AAC helps us to understand the here and now.
- A picture or photo is always there - it does not disappear or get forgotten in the same way as words.
- It is relatively easy to understand - while reading words takes years of practice.
- AAC gives extra time - to understand, think and respond.
- It helps prompt memory - the higher the stress level the more need for visuals. Using spoken language usually increases rather than decreases stress levels.
- Using visuals allows us to communicate effectively with a child without adding to his/her stress.

AAC is used by families, friends and professionals

They all help by:

- Choosing together what communication aid to make
- Using the communication aid consistently with and around the child

When do we use communication aids?

We use communication aids every day throughout our lives.

Communication aids need to be portable so they go wherever the child goes.

How long must we use communication aids for?

Sometimes you will see immediate results.

Sometimes it takes days, weeks or months before you see results.

Stick with it but think about the possibility of making modifications/changes.

Talk with your therapist and review if you're concerned about progress.

Some communication aids may be used less over time. Once a child is successful we may want to take their communication aids away. But it's a good idea to keep the communication aid handy for those times when the child needs a little extra support because they

- aren't feeling well
- haven't had enough sleep
- are just having an 'off day'

If the supports are kept in place they can be easily changed when the child transitions to a more challenging environment. If the child enters new environments and faces new challenges, it is easier to modify existing supports than reintroduce what has been taken away.

