

Communication Aids - Myth Busting

Despite its demonstrated benefits, many children do not receive Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) services.

Providing children with opportunities to experience the power of communication at the earliest possible age is important. It gives them the tools to express needs and wants, socialise, expand their learning skills and develop foundations for later language and literacy skills.

It is important that families, speech pathologists and the broader AAC community are informed about the benefits of AAC and are educated about the common misconceptions associated with its introduction and use.

Research, clinical practice and individual experiences have shown that many of the concerns we have around using AAC are unfounded.

Myth 1: She is too young or not ready to benefit

- Early use of AAC can aid language development and increase comprehension and vocabulary development in children.
- A child who is unable to communicate is at risk for delays in cognitive, social and emotional development.
- There are no prerequisites for a child to use AAC. It is important that children are provided with opportunities to engage in meaningful, communicative behaviour, even before they develop speech and language.
- It is best if children begin to learn to communicate before they get to school. Education requires a foundation of understanding and expression to build on.
- Children learn purposeful communication (e.g. eye gaze, pointing) before they develop speech and language.

Myth 2: AAC prevents speech.

- AAC is a strategy that allows children to communicate.
- Communication is multi-modal – no person can rely on one method alone and we all use multiple tools e.g. body language, gesture, pictures, writing and speech.
- Children with complex communication needs must be given the same opportunities to communicate, and more!
- AAC has been found to support speech development as children experience more successful communication, and are further motivated by their success to try again.
- AAC allows them to put words together and increase their vocabulary even when spoken words are difficult.



Myth 3: If I give him an easier option he will never talk!

- A person will always do what is easiest.
- No one has ever found not talking to be the easy option, and everyone would like to be able to use speech.
- Learning to use AAC is a process and often even skilled AAC users take a long time to express themselves.
- The more success a child has, the more motivated he becomes, and if he can talk he will. It is important he has alternatives in the meantime, otherwise he is at a greater risk of depression, negative emotions and difficult behaviour.

Myth 4: It's stigmatizing and she will look different!

- A child who does not talk, or cannot communicate, will look different.
- When a person has access to a way to express themselves, they are better able to make connections be accepted by their peers.
- Be proud to communicate, in whatever way you can!

Myth 5: Learning AAC is so difficult I wouldn't know where to start.

- Communication aids can be a whole language system, such as a PODD communication book, or the Proloquo2go app, among many others
- They can also be targeted, such as a set of community request cards to order items in a shop, or a Chat book with ideas to help remember what you wanted to talk about.
- They are also used to help understanding, reduce anxiety and help with transitions, e.g. a timetable or calendar.
- General principles of language learning apply the same as learning to talk: have opportunities, have access to the right tools, practice and make sure you can see lots of people demonstrating how good it can be!
- It is also important to get hold of the right supports. A speech pathologist can help you assess and set up the right system for you. They can also help to train you and your support networks.



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