

Understanding Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC): A Guide for Parents

By: Amanda Smith M.A. CCC-SLP



What is AAC?

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to methods of communication used to supplement or replace spoken or written language for individuals with difficulties in speech or language production. AAC can range from simple systems like picture exchange systems to high-tech options like speech-generating devices.

Key Points

- ◆ AAC helps individuals express their wants, needs, thoughts, and ideas.
- ◆ It can be temporary or long-term, depending on the individual's needs.
- ◆ AAC is not a replacement for speech, but rather a tool to aid communication.

MYTH BUSTER

Using AAC with **NOT** prevent your child from learning to talk. It actually encourages spoken language!

Why is AAC Important?

AAC is crucial for several reasons:

- **Enhances Communication:** Provides a means of communication for those who cannot rely on spoken language.
- **Reduces Frustration:** Decreases frustration and challenging behaviors that may arise from the inability to communicate effectively.
- **Promotes Social Interaction:** Facilitates social interaction and inclusion, allowing individuals to connect with others.
- **Supports Language Development:** Can support and improve language development.
- **Increases Independence:** Gives individuals more control over their environment and lives.
- **Improves Literacy:** AAC can be used to support reading and writing skills.

Different Types of AAC Systems

Unaided AAC Systems

Unaided AAC systems do not require any external tools or devices. They rely on the individual's own body.

Sign Language: Using hand movements to convey meaning.

Gestures: Using body movements, facial expressions, and pointing.



Aided AAC Systems

Aided AAC systems involve the use of external tools or devices.

- **Low-Tech AAC:** Simple tools that do not require batteries or electronics.
 - Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS): Using pictures to exchange messages.
 - Communication Boards: Boards with pictures, symbols, or words that the individual can point to.
- **High-Tech AAC:** Electronic devices that produce synthesized or digitized speech.
 - Speech-Generating Devices (SGDs): Devices that allow the user to select words or symbols to generate spoken output.
 - AAC Apps: Software applications on tablets or smartphones that offer a range of communication features.



Facilitating AAC Use at Home

Parents play a vital role in supporting their child's AAC use. Here are some effective strategies:

- **Model AAC:** Use the AAC system yourself to show your child how it works.
- **Create Communication Opportunities:** Set up situations where your child needs to communicate (e.g., placing a desired item out of reach).
- **Respond Promptly:** Acknowledge and respond to your child's communication attempts immediately.
- **Make it Accessible:** Ensure the AAC system is always available and within reach.
- **Use Visual Supports:** Incorporate visual aids like pictures, labels, and schedules into daily routines.
- **Be Patient and Positive:** Learning AAC takes time. Offer encouragement and celebrate every achievement.
- **Collaborate with Professionals:** Work closely with speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and other professionals.
- **Expand Vocabulary:** Introduce new words and symbols gradually.
- **Make it Fun:** Incorporate AAC into enjoyable activities and games.
- **Encourage Communication in All Settings:** Promote AAC use at home, in the community, and at school.



5 Easy Ways to Support AAC

Model

Use your child's AAC device or communication board as you speak.

- ex: At dinner, point to "eat"

Make it Part of Your Day

Use AAC during meals, play, getting dressed, etc.

Consistency helps build understanding

Keep it Fun!

Use your child's AAC device/board during games, songs, and favorite activities

Celebrate EVERY Effort

Don't wait for the perfect use—acknowledge any time your child attempts to communicate.

Be Patient & Encouraging

Give your child time to find words and/or symbols. Stay positive and supportive. Show that it is okay to need to search for something.

Additional Tips for Parents

Learn about your child's specific AAC system

Understand how it works, its features, and its vocabulary.

Involve the whole family

Encourage siblings, grandparents, and other family members to learn and use the AAC system.

Advocate for your child's needs

Work with schools and other organizations to ensure your child has access to the necessary resources and support.

Connect with other families

Join support groups or online communities to share experiences and learn from others.

