

Assistive Communication Devices and Apps for the Non- Verbal/Limited Verbal Child

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What is AAC?

- AAC stands for augmentative/alternative communication and describes any mode of communication that is not speaking with your mouth. This may involve pointing to or exchanging pictures, using sign language, using an AAC device that will speak a message when the user pushes a button, or many other forms of communication.

When Does a Child Need AAC?

When his/her speech output is not adequate to communicate everything that the child wants/needs to communicate

Things to consider:

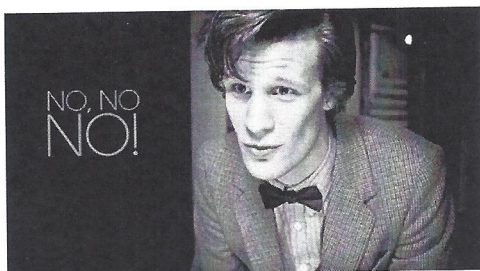
- Child's frustration levels
- Adult frustration levels
- Access to school curriculum:
 - Participation in classroom activities
 - Ability to demonstrate knowledge to teachers
- Access to home and community environment:
 - Ability to interact appropriately with family and peers
 - Independence in developmentally-appropriate daily activities

Will AAC Prevent a Child from Speaking?

- After reviewing all of the current research on augmentative and alternative communication in 2006, Millar, D. C., Light, J. C., et al. made the following statement about using AAC:

“The present research review provides important preliminary evidence that augmentative and alternative communication interventions do not inhibit speech production; instead, AAC may also support speech production”

Are There Prerequisite Skills for Using AAC?



Common AAC Prerequisite Myths

These are commonly used as excuses why AAC devices should not be attempted with children but these are **WRONG**:

- The child must understand cause and effect (AAC teaches cause and effect quite effectively)
- The child must understand that a picture represents an object (again, AAC teaches this)
- Child must have good enough motor skills for AAC
- Child must understand enough language for AAC use (babies don't have great language before they are introduced to speech)
- Child must be interested in communicating (even acting out can be shaped into intentional communication)

More: <http://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/what-are-the-prerequisites-for-using-an-aac-device-augmentativealternative-communication/>

How to Choose AAC

Options for AAC devices, methods, and systems

- Gestures/Body Language
- Sign Language
- Object Symbols (objects glued to cards)
- Picture Boards
- Picture Exchange
- Written Messages (paper or typed)
- Single Button Voice-Output Devices
- Multi-Button Voice-Output Devices
- Dynamic-Display Voice-Output Devices

Considerations When Choosing AAC Systems

- Child's mobility and physical limitations
- Family preferences and limitations
- Number of different desired communication partners
- Child's cognitive level
- Child's visual and attention skills
- Likelihood of long-term AAC use
- Child/Family's means of acquiring devices
- What the child will be using it for
- How well the child does when using the systems during trials or therapy
- Past success or failures with AAC systems

How to Introduce the System

Make it as natural as possible. Think of it as similar to how you would encourage any child to talk.

1. Get Familiar with the Child's System
2. Model AAC Use Around the Child
3. Encourage the Child When he Attempts to Use it (even if he's just playing) and Reward Differently Based on His Attempts
4. Have the Device Present at All Times
5. Provide Communication Temptations
6. Get All Adults On Board

More info: <http://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/help-child-use-aac-home-classroom-hint-easier-think/>

Providing Communication Temptations

- **How Typically-Developing Children Learn to Talk:** As parents and educators, we tend to set up situations for our children to be successful at communicating. For example, we may sit our child down in his high chair and hold up some grapes and say "do you want grapes?" Then, we pause to see if he will say it on his own. We give him a situation to say what he wants. We are even more likely to provide these opportunities when we know it's a word that our child is able to say. For example, we probably wouldn't say "what's that" when pointing to an animal that our child has never seen before, but we would probably ask him the same question when he sees a dog (or whatever his favorite animal is). We do that because we know he can say "dog" so we know he'll be successful.
- **How Children with AAC Learn to "Talk":** Set up situations during the day that will allow the child to use his AAC device to communicate. In the classroom, this may be during a structured repetitive task like snack time. Present items that you know the child will be motivated to communicate for and that the child knows how to find or use with his AAC device. For example, have some snacks that the child knows the signs to or can find the buttons for on his device.
- Show the child the item and then model the word using the child's AAC device. Then, pause to see if he will use the AAC to communicate. If he's having trouble, you can always take his hands and help him. Just make sure that the child is receptive to being touched and doesn't seem upset by your help. Some children will be just fine with this and others will become very upset. You don't want this to become a negative experience and you don't want the child to feel like he has no control over what happens to his body. Be respectful of the child's wishes if you decide to try helping him use the device and never force it.

Encouraging Spoken Speech

- Have a voice-output AAC system that the child can use as a backup
- Work on imitating actions and then slowly work toward imitating actions with the mouth and then mouth sounds (non-speech)
- Ask a question like "do you want it?" or ask them to say something and then pause until the child vocalizes (even if it seems unintentional) and then reinforce the child for making sounds
- Use behavioral momentum by adding a speech task to the end of a sequence of non-speech tasks that they can imitate/do easily
- Respond to non-speech babbling as if it were speech
- When they want something, try to get them to make a sound (any sound) with the sign as they request
- Give more reinforcement if the child vocalizes while signing
- Imitate the child's own vocalizations back to him/her
- Provide tactile cues to the lips to encourage sound production
- Remove all pressure to speak and use AAC primarily
- Try using reading: <http://ps.columbia.edu/news/kids-autism-learning-talk-starts-reading>

Communication-Based Behaviors

- Try to figure out what the child is trying to accomplish with the behavior. What's the function?
 - Escape
 - Avoidance
 - To Get Something
 - To Get Attention
 - Sensory
- Find a replacement communication that will get that need met better
- Redirect the child to the replacement behavior and don't reward the old behavior