

Gloss ~~A~~ry

Alternative/Augmentative Communication (AAC)

What does AAC mean?

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is the complex sounding term used to describe various methods of communication that can:

- **support speaking (augmentative) or**
- **replace speaking (alternative)**

We all use some form of augmentative communication in our daily lives, for example, gesture (eg: waving goodbye) instead of speaking, pointing to a picture and graphic symbols (washing label symbols, road signs, emojis).

Some children and young people *need* to use augmentative communication to help them understand what others say and/or to convey meaning. These supportive methods may be needed during a particular phase of their development or on a temporary basis at home and/or in an educational, leisure or workplace environment. However some individuals who have severe communication needs have to rely on AAC most of the time.

Different types of AAC

AAC covers a huge range of techniques that can support or replace spoken communication.

AAC techniques and systems can be categorised in the following way:

- 1 No-tech communication** does not involve any additional equipment.
Examples include: body language, gestures, pointing, facial expressions, vocalisations, and signing. Many of these may be used naturally to support communication.
- 2. Low-tech communication systems** require equipment that does not need a battery to function.

Examples include: pen and paper to write messages or draw; alphabet and word boards; communication charts or books with pictures, photos and symbols; particular objects used to stand for what the individual needs to understand or say.

- 3. High-tech communication systems** need power from a battery or mains. Most of them speak (Voice Output Communication Aid) and/or produce text.

Examples range from simple buttons or pages that speak when touched, to very sophisticated systems. Some high-tech communication systems are based on familiar equipment such as mobile devices, tablets and laptops, others use equipment specially designed to support communication.

Assessment

Communication needs vary and may be specific or be associated with a broader medical diagnosis. A thorough assessment by a speech and language therapist in partnership with you, will determine the best way(s) of supporting your child's communication.

If your child needs augmentative or alternative communication support, your speech and language therapist will discuss what may be most suitable. This will depend on your child's skills, needs and personal preferences. There are many options so it is a good idea to get specialist speech and language therapy advice in order to identify the most appropriate AAC system or systems.

The importance of appropriate AAC systems and strategies

Using AAC appropriately can have a dramatic impact on a child or young person's life because it enables communication.

It can enable them to:

- ✓ express their feelings
- ✓ ask questions and say what they need
- ✓ feel good about themselves
- ✓ develop relationships with their family and friends
- ✓ participate in school, work and play
- ✓ be involved in decisions about their future
- ✓ live an independent life
- ✓ gain employment

For children and young people who rely on or need AAC as a temporary strategy to support the development of communication, it is important to have an environment where all communication is accepted and valued, and the appropriate methods are promoted across settings.

References

The Ace Centre

<http://www.acecentre.org.uk/what-is-a-communication-aid>

The Communication Trust (2013) *Other Ways of Speaking 2nd Edition*

<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources-for-parents/other-ways-of-speaking/>

Please note: Afasic does not hold copies of any referenced material. These publications should be available at academic libraries.

Online resources

AAC Knowledge website provides service and equipment information, easy to read research evidence, case stories, FAQs, factsheets and more.

<https://www.aacknowledge.org.uk/>

Organisations which can help

ACE Centres offer specialist assessments, training and advice. Check their website for information days.

Free phone Advice Line: 0800 080 3115

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Communication Matters champions the needs of people of all ages who would benefit from AAC, whatever their condition or geographic location.

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The professional body for speech and language therapists

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