
Augmentative-Alternative Communication Parent Information

What is Augmentative-Alternative Communication (AAC)?

- AAC can be defined as, *use of various modes, that supplement (“augment”) or replace (“alternative”) one’s natural speech to enhance or facilitate his/her communicative success. Communication purposes can include getting desires met, protesting, making choices, and expressing feelings. AAC may also support transitions or literacy development.*

Why would my child use AAC?

- To increase total communication (give child ALL opportunities to communicate)
- To help achieve targeted language milestones despite limited speech output or understanding
- To decrease frustration
- To encourage social interaction
- To increase participation in academic setting

What are types of AAC?

- Visual schedules/Aides
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Communication boards/books (i.e. PODD)
- Speech-Generated devices – devices which have synthetic or recorded voice output
- iPod, iPad, or other dedicated speech device
- Switches
- Sign language

What are the involved costs?

- Price varies depending on type used (Free – sign language, certain iPad apps; \$3000 – specific dedicated speech devices)
- Evaluation and treatment costs are usually covered by insurance – check your insurance coverage
- Dedicated speech devices are generally covered by insurance/Medicaid

AAC Myths

Myth #1: AAC will keep my child from talking.

Truth: AAC does NOT hinder speech but may actually increase speech production. A study by Millar, Light & Schlosser (2006) revealed the following:

- Increased speech production – 89%
- No change in speech production – 11%
- Decrease in speech production – 0%

AAC has a POSITIVE impact on speech production. Increased interaction and participation allow AAC users to be introduced to pre-verbal skills such as turn-taking, commenting, requesting, and staying on topic. AAC decreases motor demands, relieving pressure to speak (especially true for kids with dyspraxia). In addition, AAC facilitates enhanced receptive skills by providing a consistent speech model and multiple sensory words to make connections in the brain.

*Note: Gains vary from child to child.

Myth #2: AAC will socially stigmatize my child, making them “look different” from peers.

Truth: AAC will actually help the child socialize, whether it is in the form of greetings, classroom participation, responding to questions, participating in social games, or getting the attention of others. These alternative methods of communication enhance effective communication and promote independence.

Myth #3: My child will use only alternative devices and give up on natural speech.

Truth: “Children will use the quickest, most effective, and most accessible way available to them to communicate. Speech beats any other AAC system if it is available to the child. Since AAC includes all communication methods, intervention also addresses improving functional verbal skills. Available research indicates that AAC facilitates spoken language by increasing interaction, language skills, and/or providing a voice output model for speech.” (Cynthia J. Cress, PhD)

Children will use all modes of communication, including gestures and other nonverbal forms of communication. In addition, they may also use speech output in addition to their AAC device.