

## All About Augmentative/Alternative Communication (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.

### Who Would Benefit from Using AAC?

Augmentative and alternative communication is helpful for anyone who has thoughts to communicate but has difficulty with spoken language. This includes individuals with diagnoses such as late talker, autism, childhood apraxia of speech, down syndrome, muscle disorders, or any other diagnosis that can cause a child to be unable to speak his thoughts. AAC isn't necessary or appropriate for every child with these diagnoses, but it is worth trying. Every child has the right to be given a voice.

### Does Using 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."

### How Can We Teach a Child to Use AAC to Communicate with Others?

When teaching someone to use an AAC device or system, we begin with functional communication. This means we're helping that individual learn to use the AAC to communicate their basic wants and needs. Once those needs are met, then we can begin to use the AAC for more elaborate or advanced communication.

## TOP TIPS

**Model without expectations.** Babies get to hear millions of words modelled for them with no expectation of reciprocity for an entire year, yet it's expected that a child be handed a communication device with only the smallest amount of modelling and they will know what to do with it. Even if children have already had spoken language modelled for them, they need AAC modelled just as much.

**Give children sufficient time to "explore" their AAC voices.** Almost all new AAC users will go through stages of language learning very similar to those of babies. Babbling looks like "playing" with the device – touching buttons at random, possibly repeatedly, listening to the sounds it makes, pushing them quickly or slowly...just the same way babies "play" with their voices as they learn how they work! AAC users need to continue to explore their device while learning to use it for functional communication.

**Ask questions about AAC!** Your speech therapist is a great resource. There are also lots of resources on the [Communication Matters](#) website and there are social media communities for those who use AAC full-time or just some of the time.