

Five Signs Your Child Needs Augmentative and Alternative Communication

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Tools that help people communicate are called Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), and can range from simply utilizing pictures to a high-tech device such as a tablet, iPad, or computer. Here are some guidelines that can help parents recognize when to consider AAC:

1

Child isn't talking at all

Children start saying words by the time they are between 12 to 18 months old, and begin combining 3 to 5 words together into sentences by the time they reach preschool. If a child is over two years old and is relying on gestures (i.e., pointing, grabbing your hand, etc.), then starting AAC is essential in helping that child expand his/her communication skills.

2

Child isn't talking much

Sometimes children have some words, but they aren't using them to create more complex sentence structures. Perhaps a child can piece together thoughts into simple sentences ("give to me") but they aren't using conjunctions ("and" or "but"), prepositions ("in" and "under"), and other grammatical markers ("run" vs. "ran" or "mouse" vs. "mice"). Technology can help kids to start creating longer and more sophisticated sentences.

3

Child is talking, but isn't intelligible

A true test of a child's intelligibility is whether or not listeners who are less accustomed to the child's speech (i.e., extended family and friends) understand the child. By 3 years of age, an unfamiliar listener should be able to understand 75% of what a child is saying. If a child's speech clarity is severely impacted, AAC can be used as a tool to help a child clarify his/her message during breakdowns in communication.

4

Child is scripting or only saying nouns

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often have a large and detailed vocabulary of nouns, but lack relevant verbs, adjectives, and prepositions (the true building blocks of sentences). Children with ASD might also have the capacity to memorize long scripts from past experiences but do not understand the meaning of the individual words they are using. Utilizing an AAC device creates a visual representation of these words and can help children understand and use these words to create novel sentences.

5

You, or anyone, thinks your child needs AAC

If any educator, doctor, or therapist mentions AAC as a potential option, then a child would likely benefit from AAC. Communication devices allow students to simultaneously hear how a word sounds, see a picture of the word, and see how it is spelled. When these words are paired with meaningful experiences, children begin communicating with intention. Rest assured, AAC does not slow down a child from learning to use spoken language, but instead can be an invaluable tool to help enhance a child's communication development.

To read the full article, go to bit.ly/5signsaac. For more information, available resources, or to discuss the possibility of an AAC evaluation, reach out to your SLP, IEP team, and/or Regional Center service coordinator.