



GIVELANGUAGE

Alternative and Augmentative Communication at Home and in the Classroom

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) is a system of tools designed to enhance a person's ability to interact with their environment. The specific AAC device is only one small part of the overall structure that also contains caregiver/teacher training, symbol set selection, method of access, and contexts and strategies for use. Some tips for effective use of AAC in the classroom:

- **Start small.** People usually don't jump right into using a complex communication device. Expect to start simple using a fixed core word set and move up in vocabulary size and sentence structure.
- **Honor every communicative act.** The first step to successful use of AAC is the person's understanding that interacting with the device accomplishes something. When they use it, even if they're just "playing," respond to their output as though it were intentional. This helps them to develop the cause and effect relationship that enables them to see their AAC as a means of communication.
- **Model, model, model!** Research indicates that it takes between 2,000 and 10,000 observations for a typically developing child to acquire a language structure. We need to expect the same from people using AAC. Model different communicative functions repeatedly (e.g., requesting, greeting, responding), using a separate but identical device when possible.
- **Use devices consistently across all contexts.** As much as possible, ensure that the person has access to his or her device everywhere that they go. In situations where weather or mobility may restrict access, having a printed/laminated version mirroring the board on their system can continue to develop their use of the device.
- **Each device is person-specific.** Each AAC system should be "owned" in a general sense by the person who uses it. That means it is used for communication only and is not shared between people. Taking the device away for any reason is the equivalent of taking away that person's voice, and it's tailored just for them! Think of it as a prosthetic like glasses – could you use someone else's prescription?
- **Foster social interaction.** Facilitate situations in which people interact with their peers using their devices. These interactions can begin with scripted greeting exchanges and move up to more sophisticated discourse. This helps person generalize device use across settings.
- **One person may communicate across multiple modalities.** An alternative/augmentative communication device may be one of many means by which a person conveys messages. Others could be picture symbols, sign language, verbalizations, gestures, body language, facial expressions, and more. When a person is being trained in the use of a device, it can be useful to "recast" their communicative attempts by modeling with the device. For example, if a person indicates that they want a certain snack via gesture, the guide can show them how to make that request using the AAC system and then honor the request. Don't create a negative association with the device by requiring people to use it exclusively when they are first learning!
- **Technology needs maintenance,** Remember to plug in the device regularly to make sure the battery is charged. For some people using iPad devices, you can also use Guided Access (disabling the "home" button) to ensure that the person stays within the communication app. Check the device often for software updates, especially if it doesn't always connect to WiFi.