AAC

Augmentative and Alternative Communication

RESOURCE GUIDE *for* FAMILIES

All children need to communicate to share their thoughts and feelings, to build relationships with others, and to learn. Our ability to communicate verbally and in writing enables us to get along in the world effectively, but we often take it for granted. We rarely think about other means of communication and about individuals who may not be able to communicate using the same means that most people use.

Some children with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, or other disabilities may not be able to communicate with speech; their ability to form friendships, express their desires and needs, and make appropriate progress in school can be facilitated by the use of assistive technology (AT). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), assistive technology must be considered for these children in the form of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

Providing AAC services is a part of the assistive technology considerations. AAC can help children access, participate in, and make progress in educational activities. This guide provides information and resources for families with children who have difficulty being understood and therefore might benefit from AAC. It has been arranged in a question-and-answer format to address topics of interest to families, with examples of common situations that occur in schools.

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Hello! My name is Sally, I communicate using this this communication display. I point to the words and alphabets with my middle finger. When I finish a word or sentence I will look up. Please read aloud the words and letters that I point to.

I	Me	To	A	All	That	The	These	Am	Every	Some	Please	Bag	1	2	3
It	We	Am	Are	Be	Call	Come	Eat	About	And	At	Thank you	Book	4	5	6
He	Him	Can	Could	Feel	Find	Get	Drink	Be-cause	But	By	Good	Bus	7	8	9
She	Her	Did	Do	Help	Hurt	Know	Give	Down	For	From	Cold	Food	Sun	0	$
They	Them	Had	Has	Love	Make	Move	See	If	In	Off	More	Drink	Mon	Tue	Wed
You	Your	Have	Is	Need	Put	Read	-ed	Or	Over	Then	Really	TV	Thur	Fri	Sat
Don't	Not	Was	Were	Say	Tell	Think	-ing	Up	With		Very	Wheel chair	Day	Time	Now
Can't	Won't	Will	Would	Use	Want	Work	-s	Opposite		For ward	Left	Un comfor table	Hrs	Mins	Today
What	Where	Who	Which one	qu	w	e	r	t	y		u	i	o	p	space	Tomo rrow
When	How	Why		a	s	d	f	g	h		j	k	l	:	delete	Yeste rday
Ask me yes/ no questions	Start over	YES		z	x	c	v	b	n	m		,	.	?	NO	Finish

What is augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)?

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is simply communicating by means other than speech. It can include gestures, signs, letters of the alphabet, picture and word boards, and forms of technology such as computers that generate speech to share ideas, develop friendships, and express needs and wants. We all use forms of augmentative communication in our daily lives (gestures, signs, body language, pointing), though most of us most commonly use speech and the written word to express ourselves.

How can AAC help my child?

In order to participate in social activities, make friends, and be successful learners, children need ways to ask and answer questions and provide information. They also need to communicate to build social relationships with peers and adults. Remember: your child needs to communicate with all of the people in her environment (i.e., teachers, classmates, friends, family members, and family friends). To accomplish these goals and make these connections, your child might need access to AAC.

Does my child need to demonstrate certain skills before he can be a candidate for AAC?

No, anyone can use AAC. Just as typical children are provided with speech models, children who require AAC need models of AAC (i.e., they need to be carefully taught how to use the AAC system) to become competent communicators. AAC systems, whether electronically based or not, can support the intentions of all children to communicate and to participate in learning.

I want my child to communicate using speech...

Does using AAC discourage the development of speech?

No, studies have shown that the use of AAC actually improves speech development for children who are able to physically produce speech. In addition, AAC improves language development for children who have limited speech or have difficulty being understood. For example, a child might use an AAC system to clarify something she has tried to convey verbally.

My child just began using AAC...

How many new symbols should I present at once?

This will vary for each child, but no matter what system your child is using (e.g., low-tech communication boards, Tech Talk, or iPad/iPod), he should have access to more symbols than he will use at any one time. Typically-developing children are exposed to words that they might not use right away. It should be the same for children using AAC. They should be provided with the opportunity to use new vocabulary regularly.
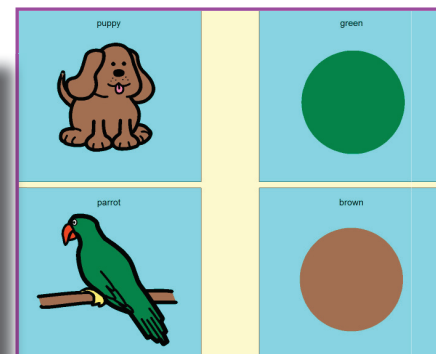
mineleke

play

dad

go out

puppy

green

parrot

brown

What can I do to help my child use AAC to communicate more effectively?

As with any assistive technology, when AAC is used at school, it must be used at home. This is particularly true for augmentative communication, as a child needs to have the opportunity and method to communicate at all times. Family members need to know how to help the child use AAC effectively and efficiently so that it becomes a natural part of life in all environments. To facilitate the use of an AAC system, parents and family members may need informal and formal training. IDEA recommends that as part of the AT services, training and technological assistance may be provided to individuals who are "substantially involved in the major life functions" of a child receiving services (e.g., family members) (20 USC 1401). However, it is up to the local public districts and programs of early intervention to decide the nature and the intensity of the training.

I have seen some children use computers to "talk." My child can speak, but not everyone can understand her...

Should my child have a computer to speak for her?

This depends on the results of the AAC assessment conducted by a professional with experience in AAC (e.g., a speech-language pathologist). This assessment may or may not indicate the need for a speech-generating computer. The team that develops the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or the student's Planning and Placement Team (PPT) might find that a low-tech device (e.g., a communication board) is appropriate, depending on the current abilities and needs of your child. If you think that your child is unable to communicate effectively with people in her environment and needs a computer that "talks," speak with her teachers and speech and language pathologist. Explain your concerns and come up with a team decision that will suit the needs of your child.
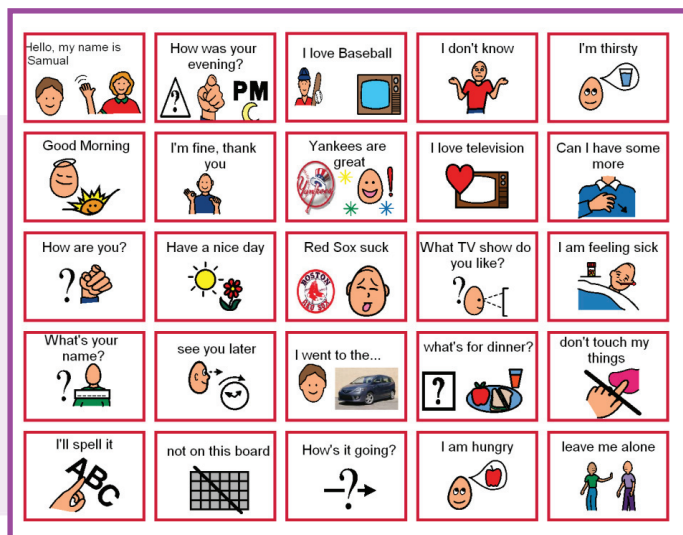
Should my child need to use his speech-generating computer all the time?

The mode of communication your child uses at any particular time will depend upon the communication demands of the situation. For example, during mealtime your child can point to foods he wants. On the other hand, if he is playing party games, a computerized device or communication board may allow him to communicate with people he does not know. Or during a trip to the mall, your child might use a communication display as it can be easily carried around. Children who are unable to communicate using speech should have access to their AAC systems at all times, but they should be encouraged to use whatever means are appropriate to communicate their messages. This may mean using sign language, gestures, or paper-based systems in addition to more complex systems. Each individual should be encouraged to have a multimodal communication system.

I want my child to use an iPad to communicate, but his PPT is suggesting another device...

How do I know which device is right for my child?

The best device for any individual child may not always be the latest one on the market or the most expensive one. An AAC assessment determines the best AAC system for a child depending upon her particular abilities and needs. A child can communicate as effectively with a device that is not expensive as with one that is on the cutting edge of technology.

Selected CT AAC Resources	Contact	Services
Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) 350 State Street, North Haven, CT 06473 203-498-6800 ♦ www.aces.org	**Vanessa Taragowski** vtaragowski@aces.org ♦ 203-498-6849	Evaluation/Assessment; On-site technical assistance/consultation; Training and Professional Development; Low-interest loans for purchasing AAC devices
Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) 111 Charter Oak Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106 860-246-3304 ♦ www.crec.org	**Carolann Cormier, MS, ATP, CCC-SLP** ccormier@crec.org ♦ 860-298-9079 **Nicole Natale, MS, CCC-SLP** nnatale@crec.org ♦ 860-298-9079	Evaluation/Assessment; On-site technical assistance/consultation; Training and Professional Development; Information for parents
Connecticut Birth to Three System 460 Capitol Ave., Hartford, CT 06106 860-418-6147 ♦ www.birth23.org	**Linda Goodman, Director** Linda.Goodman@ct.gov 860-418-6147	Evaluation/Assessment; Training and Professional Development
Connecticut Children's Medical Center **Connecticut Children's Hospital Speech & Hearing Clinic** 282 Washington Street, Hartford, CT 06106 860-545-9000 ♦ www.connecticutchildrens.org	**Patti Albert** MS, CCC-SLP ♦ 860-545-9640 **Virginia McGoey-Radshaw,** MS, CCC-SLP ♦ 860-545-9640	Evaluation/Assessment; On-site technical assistance/consultation; Collaboration with AAC vendors
Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Bureau of Special Education 165 Capitol Ave., Rm. 369, Hartford, CT 06106 860-713-6910 ♦ www.sde.ct.gov/sde	**Maria Synodi,** **Coordinator of Early Childhood** **Special Education** maria.synodi@ct.gov ♦ 860-713-6941	On-site technical assistance/consultation; Training and Professional Development; Information for parents
Connecticut Tech Act Project 25 Sigourney Street, 11th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106 860-424-4881, (TTY) 860-424-4839 **www.cttechact.com**	**Arlene Lugo, ATP** Arlene.Lugo@ct.gov 860-424-4881	Recycling of AAC devices; Low-interest loans for purchasing AAC devices; Information for parents
CT Parent Information & Resource Center 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 800-842-8678 ♦ www.ctpirc.org	**Barbara Slone** slone@ctserc.org ♦ 860-632-1485, ext. 340	Information for parents
Cooperative Educational Services (CES) 40 Lindeman Drive, Trumbull, CT 06610 203-365-8800 ♦ www.ces.k12.ct.us	**Laura Giovanetti, MS, ATP, CCC-SLP** giovanel@ces.k12.ct.us ♦ 203-365-8891	Evaluation/Assessment; On-site technical assistance/consultation; Training and Professional Development; Equipment lending library
EASTCONN 10 Commerce Drive, Columbia, CT 06237 860-228-3240 ♦ www.eastconn.org	**Carol Magliocco, Ph.D., ATP, PT** cmagliocco@eastconn.org ♦ 860-455-0707 **Amy Norton, M.Ed., ATP** anorton@eastconn.org ♦ 860-455-0707	Evaluation/Assessment; On-site technical assistance/consultation; Training and Professional Development; Equipment lending library
NEAT Marketplace 120 Holcomb Street, Hartford, CT 866-526-4492 or 860-286-3102 **www.neatmarketplace.org**	**Jennifer Baker, MS/P, ATP** bakerj@ciboakhill.org ♦ 860-243-2869	Evaluation/Assessment; Training and Professional Development; Equipment lending library
State Education Resource Center (SERC) 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457 860-632-1485 ♦ www.ctserc.org	**Smita Worah, Ph.D.** worah@ctserc.org ♦ 860-632-1485, ext. 319	On-site technical assistance/consultation; Training and Professional Development; Information for parents
Southern Connecticut State University 501 Crescent Street, New Haven, CT 06515 203-392-5200 ♦ www.southernct.edu	**Kevin McNamara, MS, CCC-SLP** mcnamarak2@southernct.edu 203-392-5982	Evaluation/Assessment

LEGEND

- Evaluation/Assessment
- On-site technical assistance/consultation for implementation
- Training and Professional Development
- Collaboration with AAC vendors
- Recycling of AAC devices
- Low-interest loans for purchasing AAC devices
- Equipment lending library
- Information for parents

AAC-RERC: The Augmentative and Alternative Communication Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center functions as a collaborative research group dedicated to the development of effective AAC technology. This Web site includes a variety of research-based information, including handouts of presentations and Webcasts for families. **http://aac-rerc.psu.edu**

The Augmentative Communication On-Line User's Group (ACOLUG): The ACOLUG is an Internet LISTSERV list that allows users of augmentative communication and their families to communicate with one other and with professionals who are interested in augmentative communication. **http://www.temple.edu/instituteondisabilities/programs/aac/acolug**

AT/AAC enABLES: This Web site demonstrates how assistive technology and AAC enable individuals with disabilities to participate in all aspects of life. **http://depts.washington.edu/enables**

Augmentative Communication, Inc.: The ACI is a Web site that supports two newsletters: "Augmentative Communication News" and "Alternatively Speaking." **http://www.augcominc.com/newsletters**

http://aackids.psu.edu: Early intervention for young children with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and other disabilities. This Web site provides guidelines for early intervention to maximize the language and communication development of young children with special needs.

International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC): ISAAC works to improve the life of every child and adult who may be unable to communicate using speech. **http://www.isaac-online.org**

http://aacliteracy.psu.edu: Literacy instruction for individuals with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and other disabilities. This Web site provides guidelines for teaching literacy skills to learners with special needs, especially learners with complex communication needs (CCN).