

Learn AAC Guide

This guide contains key elements for symbol-based AAC users to become successful communicators. Use it to help set priorities, plan next steps, find more information and problem solve.

Setting up for AAC

Presume competence

We presume competence. Presuming competence affects how we make choices around AAC, and how we provide opportunities and access to words, communication functions and the alphabet. Presuming competence also means that there are no prerequisite skills or age requirements to start using AAC.

Select a balanced AAC system

Select a balanced AAC system, based on core words with quick access to fringe vocabulary, and the alphabet.

Choosing a grid size

Choose a grid size based on what the AAC user can see and touch, not based on cognitive skills, receptive language or what we think the AAC user can do.

Personalize vocabulary and system

Personalize the vocabulary so the AAC user has access to important words. Customize the system settings to meet the AAC user's needs.

Make AAC Always Available

Make every environment set up for instant access to AAC. AAC should always be available. Consider cases, straps, paper-based copies as well as having the device charged and turned on.

Get the team on board

All members of the team know about AAC and are ready and willing to be a part of AAC learning.

Plan for AAC throughout the day

Look at routines and make a plan for where, when and how AAC can be integrated in the day.

Starting communication

Start modeling

Point to words on the AAC system as we talk to the AAC user. Model regularly throughout the day. Model different reasons to communicate - not just requests. Model in conversations and natural interactions.

Consider communication functions

When we consider communication functions, we can plan and then model words that will build language and meaningful communication. We can expand an AAC user's world beyond choice-making!

Activity-specific vs using balance vocabulary

Use core words and fringe folders, rather than creating activity specific boards for everything.

Build Communication Partner skills

Communication Partners will model words on the AAC system. We wait, prompt & respond to the AAC users attempts at communication. We make comments,

rather than ask questions and accept all forms of communication.

Engage and Interact

Choose engaging and interesting activities, that give the AAC user motivation to communicate. Create opportunities for communication. Model on the AAC system during conversations and everyday interactions.

Building language and communication

Learn about core word teaching strategies

Strategies for teaching core words can include: planning core words based on activities or communication functions, teaching using the Core Word of the week, or using the Descriptive Teaching Model.

Teach Grammar

Consider ways to teach combining words and grammar to AAC users who are ready.

Integrating comprehensive literacy instruction

Integrate communication learning alongside comprehensive literacy instruction for AAC users. This includes providing opportunities for learning sounds/ letters, reading, spelling and writing.

Get practical ideas for building language

We need to have bank of ideas and materials that support continued modeling and AAC learning. These ideas will build language and communication for AAC users.

Review and reflect

Review and monitor progress. Reflect and make changes. Take videos. Try new things and continuing to push AAC without giving up!

Potential Roadblocks to success:

Give up too soon

Do not give up too soon! Be persistent! Make a plan for success. Celebrate successes.

Lack of support in different environments

Make AAC available in those different environments. Support it by working with teams. Collect evidence to share.

Stalled at choice-making and requesting

Do not limit language by only offering choices. Instead model language for different communication functions.

Different AAC Systems in 1 environment

Teams need to get to know the systems. They need more flexibility to fast switch between systems. Often, AAC users are more flexible than the environment!

AAC will stop a person learning to speak

Research shows that AAC can have positive effects on speech and language development, and does not stop an AAC user learning to speak.

AAC users are required to prove themselves

We should be presuming competence and not requiring any prerequisite skills before they can be eligible for a full balanced AAC system.

NOTE: Every AAC user is different! Be flexible at each phase of the journey!