

What is AAC?

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) includes all forms of communication (other than oral speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas. We all use AAC when we make facial expressions or gestures, use symbols or pictures, or write.

People with severe speech or language problems rely on AAC to supplement existing speech or replace speech that is not functional. Special augmentative aids, such as picture and symbol communication boards and electronic devices, are available to help people express themselves. This may increase social interaction, school performance, and feelings of self-worth.

AAC users should not stop using speech if they are able to do so. The AAC aids and devices are used to enhance their communication.

Success in life can be directly related to the ability to communicate. Full interpersonal communication substantially enhances an individual's potential for education, employment, and independence. Therefore, it is imperative that the goal of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) use be the most effective interactive communication possible. Anything less represents a compromise of the individual's human potential.

What are the types of AAC systems?

When children or adults cannot use speech to communicate effectively in all situations, there are options.

Unaided communication systems – rely on the user's body to convey messages. Examples include gestures, body language, and/or sign language.

Aided communication systems – require the use of tools or equipment in addition to the user's body. Aided communication methods can range from paper and pencil to communication books or boards to devices that produce voice output (speech generating devices or SGD's) and/or written output. Electronic communication aids allow the user to use picture symbols, letters, and/or words and phrases to create messages. Some devices can be programmed to produce different spoken languages.

To contact a speech-language pathologist, visit ASHA ProFind.

What does an SLP do when working with individuals who use AAC?

ASHA has developed a number of documents outlining the role of the SLP with AAC.

These documents include:

- Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Knowledge and Skills for Service Delivery
- Roles and Responsibilities of Speech-Language Pathologists With Respect to Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Position Statement
- Roles and Responsibilities of Speech-Language Pathologists With Respect to Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Technical Report

The Preferred Practice Patterns for the Profession of Speech-Language Pathology outline the common practices followed by SLPs when engaging in various aspects of the profession. The Preferred Practice Patterns for AAC assessment and intervention are outlined in Sections 26 and 27.

Success!

When people who rely on AAC have the benefit of a methodical and scientific process in the selection and application of an AAC system, they also have the highest potential for personal achievement.