

Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Common Questions

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to any system, device or technique (e.g. signing or pictures) that improves the ability of a person with a communication impairment to communicate effectively.

Q: Does AAC hinder or stop further speech development?

A: No, it is used to assist with speech & language development.

Research tells us AAC does not interfere with, but facilitates speech development. The introduction of AAC devices has not been associated with a loss of speech skills.

AAC assists in improving the success of a child's communication through increased interaction and initiation. When an adult uses speech along with their child's AAC system, it can be most successful in developing speech comprehension & production. Language skills also develop through the use of AAC. In addition, the use of signing and visual supports can enhance comprehension skills.

Children who use speech and AAC will always choose to use speech first if they are able to, as it is the quickest and easiest way to get their message across.

Using AAC does not mean you are giving up on speech development. You will continue to work on speech development alongside AAC to ensure your child has an effective way to communicate with every one around them.

Q: Is AAC a last resort?

A: No, it is not a last resort. It can be used at any time.

It is a common misconception that AAC should only be used as a last resort. It is this belief that can cause AAC interventions to be introduced too late. It can be very difficult for professionals to predict when a child may develop "easy to understand" or functional speech. So, while therapy may continue to focus on developing speech skills, it is unfair to leave a child with little or no means to communicate effectively.

Early use of AAC can promote language development and have a positive affect on speech, cognitive skills and social communication. Using AAC will provide your child with more opportunities to interact and usually reduces their frustration.

Q: What age should we start using AAC?

A: You can start using AAC at any age. The earlier, the better!

AAC intervention can start at any time. There are no cognitive or other prerequisite skills required for a child to start using AAC.

Q: Are voice output devices better than low-tech communication aids?

A: No, both high and low tech communication aids are useful.

Choosing the right communication aid will depend on the needs of the individual. Some users may find low-tech systems such as communication books and boards more appropriate. They can be simple, reliable and used in any environment. High tech communication devices provide users with a voice of their own. They can be useful to gain attention and to interact across distances. It is not necessary to choose between high and low tech communication aids as these systems can be used either together or separately within different situations.

The Independent Living Centre Technology Team (ILC Tech)

ILC Tech delivers information and training on augmentative and alternative communication equipment for people of all ages.

The ILC Tech team consists of Occupational Therapists and Speech Pathologists. Consultation can be done by phone, by email, by appointment in person or by videoconference. The purpose of ILC Tech is to assist people in being aware of the range of technology options that are available with suitable features to meet their needs. Using the ILC Tech service enhances the users knowledge and confidence in selecting their best technology options.

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References

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