

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)



Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) can support communication for children with disabilities. AAC is found in many formats and should be individualized for a child's particular communication needs and strengths. In this case, one size doesn't fit all!

Why use AAC?

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) enables others to understand the needs and wants of young children with disabilities.

- Some children with disabilities have no vocal speech that is understood. These children may use AAC as *alternative communication* instead of their verbal speech. In these children's cases, you would not hear them speaking verbally, but you would see or hear them communicating using AAC only.
- Other children with disabilities have some speech but may need additional supports. These children may use AAC as *augmentative communication* to add to their vocal speech. They might use AAC at the same time as their speech to communicate more quickly or to say longer or more complex sentences.

AAC in practice

A 4-year-old may use a picture card to show a teacher a photo of an easel to indicate that he is ready to select the painting work during choice time. A 3-year-old may use a speech-enabled tablet to say "bike" on the playground so she can have a turn on the bicycle from a friend. A 4-year-old may sign "more" to request more fruit during snack time in the classroom. Each of these uses of AAC are examples of children having increased access and participation in routine class activities and further opportunities to build and strengthen friendships.

Teaching AAC skills

Typically, a speech-language pathologist (SLP) will work with a young child to teach and support their use of AAC. If a family member or early childhood teacher has questions about AAC, they can ask this provider. The family member and teacher should collaborate with the SLP to ensure that the vocabulary taught and integrated into the AAC are routinely used at school and at home. Be sure to add new or special words, such as favorite foods, preferred activities, and friends' names!

AAC everywhere!

Children should have access to their AAC everywhere that young children communicate. Young children have rich conversations on the playground, at the snack table, during messy play, and at mealtimes. Children with disabilities have a right to use their AAC during those times. It is important to protect the AAC from the elements by, for example, laminating picture cards to keep them from getting wet during an art activity or putting a foam case with a handle around a tablet before playground time.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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