

# Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. How long will it take for my child to use their AAC themselves?

Successful AAC takes a long time and there is no definitive answer for how long it will take. There is lots of variety in when verbal children begin to talk so AAC use is no different. Children who have no additional needs usually take around 2 years before talking becomes natural and the same is often true for our AAC users, if not longer. Your child needs you to teach them how to use their system for them to learn it themselves. The more they are shown how to use it, the more you are increasing their chances of one day using it themselves.

Consider how, when children begin to talk, we have been speaking to them for around 18 months (from birth), often without them responding verbally back to us. It is important to use the same approach with our new AAC users as we can't expect them to use their systems themselves if they only practice using it for 30 minutes, twice a week. The more we model language using their AAC (at home at school and out in the community) the better the outcomes.

### 2. Will using AAC stop my child from talking?

No, research suggests that using symbols or signs alongside spoken language is helpful and can promote children's language development. We recommend using the symbol or sign at the same time as you say the spoken word to support your child's understanding and use of language. Some children use a combination of words, signs and symbols for different things. AAC gives them the tools to say whatever they want to say, however they choose to say it.

### 3. When should I model language?

In the answer to question 1, we compared speaking with children who use AAC to children who use verbal communication. If we do that again and rephrase this question as though we were considering a verbal child, we would ask 'when should I talk to my child?' Instead of thinking about 'when' to do it, think about trying to do it as much as possible and not as a 'separate' task. You are already talking to your child every day, the approach is now changing to involve you modelling their AAC when you talk to them. The overall goal is for you to interact and communicate with your child and the AAC system is a tool for helping that.



#### **4. Which words should go on my child's AAC system?**

Have a think about what your child loves to do, important places and people in their life. It is important that your child's AAC system is personalised to them, so we need your help as parents, carers and staff who know your child really well to help to create a list of meaningful vocabulary for your child.

See our ['AAC vocabulary list'](#) on our AAC page for ideas of words you might need.

It is likely that your child will have lots of words/pictures/symbols on their system which they are not yet using. It can be tempting to only use a small selection of words however we need to give them a system that they have the potential to 'grow in to' to allow them opportunities to develop their language skills without having to keep changing their system. Lots of changes to systems can be confusing for your child.

It will be important however to change the vocabulary on your child's systems as they get older and their interests change. Please contact your child's speech and language therapist if you feel additional vocabulary for their system is required.

#### **5. Should we have one system for home and another system for school?**

No, your child's system should go with them between home and school (and anywhere else they may go!) Things get complicated when more than one system is used as pages might move around or symbols might get lost. It's really important that your child is familiar with where the pages and symbols are on their system and the best way for them to do that is for them to have 1 communication system which is used across all settings.