

Supporting AAC Users With Complex Communication Needs In Community Settings

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Introduction

- Effective communication allows us to express wants and needs, gain information about the world around us, build relationships, and take part in social activities. We often use speech and language to communicate although, people with complex communication needs may use Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC). AAC allows users to communicate with the many people in their lives (family members, teachers, peers, etc.). Whether in the classroom or out in the community, it is important to understand what AAC is and how it is used. Additionally, it is important to understand how to support users.
- The purpose of this poster is to help those unfamiliar with AAC understand the wide variety of AAC used, explore some of the myths and facts associated with using AAC, and learn tips for communicating with AAC users with complex communication needs.

Definitions

- **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** Includes all the ways someone may communicate besides speech. Augmentative refers to ways that are added to someone’s speech. Alternative refers to ways used instead of speech (ASHA, n.d.).
- **Complex Communication Needs (CCN):** A broad term to describe someone with language or communication differences or impairments (Commrights, n.d.).
- **Communication Bill of Rights:** “All people with a disability of any extent or severity have a basic right to affect, through communication” This includes, but is not limited the right to socially interact, request, protest, ask for and receive information, access intervention and support (Brady et al., 2007).

AAC Myths and Facts

Myths	Facts
Lack of verbal speech means a lack of comprehension or understanding.	Being unable to communicate verbally does not mean a person cannot hear or understand. We should always assume that a person can understand our words and we should provide AAC users with the opportunity to engage and communicate for themselves.
AAC should only be used as a “last resort”.	AAC should be used whenever needed to aid or replace verbal communication.
Only a formal communication partner can communicate with the AAC user.	Communication is about making connections. AAC allows users to communicate needs and feelings in an accessible manner.
AAC is a user’s only form of communication.	No one uses only one form of communication, think of talking, body language, text, and facial expressions. AAC is just an additional way of sharing a message.
Not speaking means not communicating.	Some people with CCN may need support to communicate. Not communicating verbally does not mean they have nothing to share.

Information adapted from DeMoux (2021), ASHA (n.d.)

Types of AAC

Unaided

No Tech

- Gestures
- Facial expressions
- Body language
- Manual signs

Aided

Low Tech

- Communication boards/books
- Picture/symbol cards
- Keyboard/alphabet charts

Mid Tech

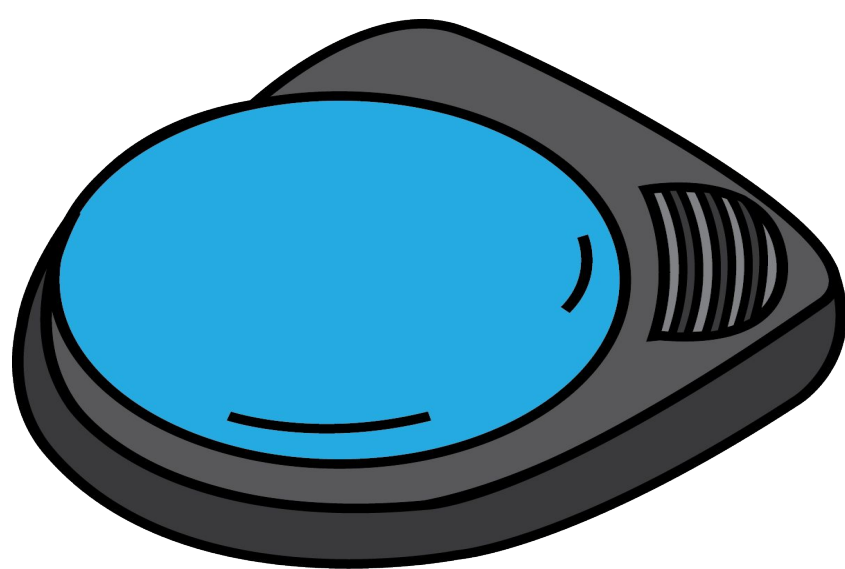
- Switches
- Single message devices/recordable devices

High Tech

- Speech Generating Device (SGD)
- AAC software used on technology (e.g. tablet, phone, computer)

Information adapted from AssistiveWare (n.d.)

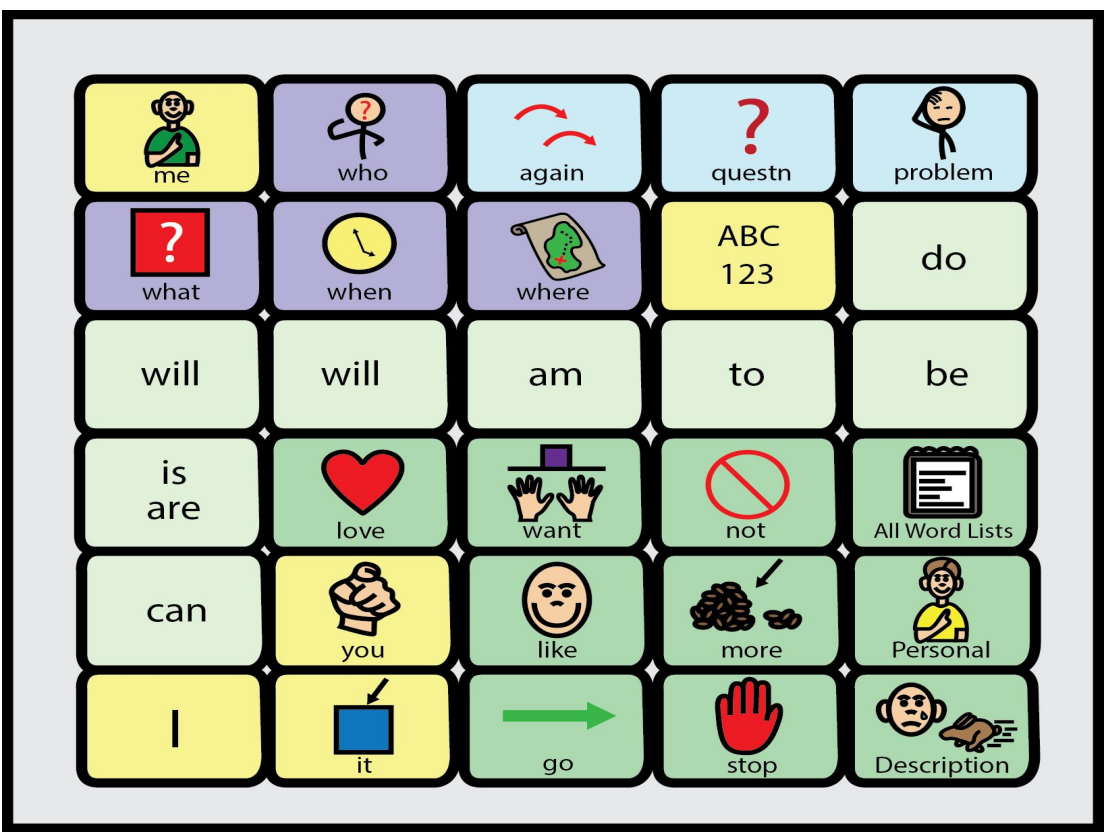
Examples of AAC



Switch Device



SGD or Tablet with AAC Software



Communication Board

Supporting AAC Users: Tips for the Community

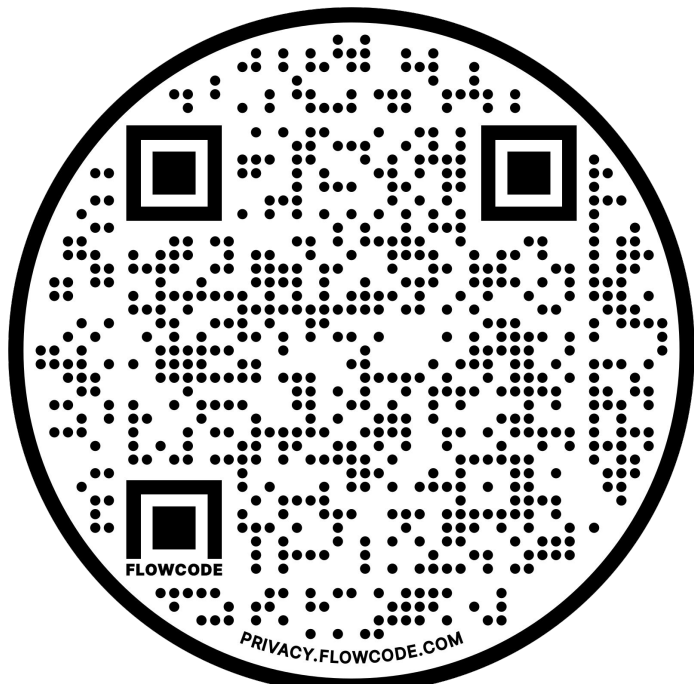
- Honor every communication attempt - provide feedback
- Be patient - Allow time for the communicator to provide their message
- One question at a time - too many questions create too many demands on a communicator
- Look at the user as they communicate
- Share your knowledge with others

Information adapted from Chazin (2018), Brady et al., (2007)

Ideas for Community Accessible AAC

- Playgrounds and Parks
- Zoos and Aquariums
- Librariaes
- Museums

References



Images recieved from JB Design