



# AAC– Augmentative and Alternative Communication

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Assistive Technology for Communication includes tools/technology used to help with hearing, speaking, reading, and writing. A big part of AT for Communication is Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)—all of the ways we share our thoughts/ideas without talking.

**AAC may be any tool, light to high tech, used to help someone communicate.**

Some **light tech systems** may be made of paper— a single page or multiple pages in a binder. These systems can include picture symbols, photos, or written words. The choice of symbol system depends on the needs/abilities of the user. Light tech AAC doesn't speak out loud. **The user points to indicate what they want to say and the partner needs to be looking to “hear” it.**

Some **mid tech AAC devices include buttons that are pressed to play a message.** Devices might have one big button, or many and usually run on batteries. The user can say messages that were recorded on the device.

**High tech devices can be accessed in different ways—touch the screen, press a switch, or use eyes to speak a message.** Speech is **generated by a computer**—thousands of words that can be combined

many ways. The person can speak words and phrases and express new thoughts.

**The term augmentative is used when AAC is needed to support someone who speaks but may have trouble being understood** by unfamiliar partners. They use AAC to repair communication. **AAC is alternative when it takes the place of speech**—for someone cannot speak at all due to disability

**The type of AAC that works best depends on the abilities of the user.** Choosing AAC is an individualized decision. We need to know about the person's abilities—their motor skills, vision, and hearing. Can they push a button, or do they need another way? We then match that person's abilities to the tools to suit their needs. If the device are not accessible, it is more likely to be abandoned.

We keep trying AAC tools until we find what works for that person. We provide them with choices and set the stage so they have something meaningful to talk about. Learning a new communication system is like learning a new language. It takes time.

We will know what tool works best for the person when we see them choose to use it. **One size does not fit all.**