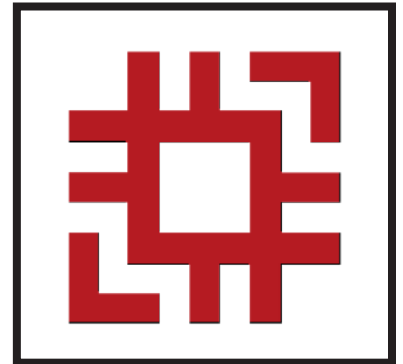




Symbols

A symbol is something that represents or stands for something else.



A symbol can be anything that represents something else—a photo, a line drawing, a word, or an emoji.

When a person uses symbols, it is easier to understand what they are trying to say. Symbols—words, pictures, or signs—represent objects, actions, feelings, and other concepts; put together they form language.

We talk to use spoken words as symbols and to communicate our ideas to the listener. Through emails, or text messages—written words tell our story. Emojis help convey the emotions that are usually via body language and tone of voice. We can use whatever we need to get our message across.

Symbols don't have to be words. Here are some examples:

- toy banana = real fruit.
- rough texture = “bad”; soft texture =“good”.
- A photo of a person who is important to us.
- Colorful drawing of a pizza = the concept “pizza”.
- Sign language interpreter uses her hands, face, and body = speech to a listener who is Deaf.

When someone doesn't have a voice or language to

tell us what they are thinking, we need to find the right kind of symbol to help them. What symbol will depend on the individual's needs. We don't want to jumble together a random grouping of photos, pictures, etc.—use something consistent.

AAC systems and devices use “symbol sets”—symbol groups that share some common characteristics. Many people are familiar with the Boardmaker Picture Communication symbols that are used in PECs books. Other systems are Smarty Symbols, Symbol Stix, Pixons, Makaton and Bliss Symbols

A school in Canada first began to use the Bliss Symbolics book to help students with cerebral palsy communicate. To convey what he wanted to be for Halloween, one student chose symbols for, “Creature drinks blood night.”—a vampire! This is the power of using AAC for functional communication.

Use a set of symbols that works for that particular person. If they are literate—maybe text to speech. An emergent communicator—picture symbols might be right. Tactile symbols might for someone with low vision. Symbols can make a big difference for the person you support.