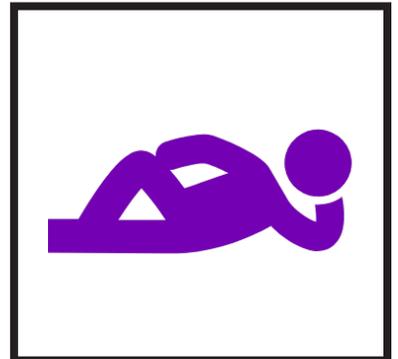




# No Worries

When we feel relaxed, it is easier to talk to other people. Stress and pressure make it harder.



Think about the last time you had to give a presentation in class, or defend your opinion to your supervisor. I still have occasional nightmares about my first job. Under pressure, we often feel the need to be perfect. We experience anxiety and stage fright. Under pressure, it is quite simply difficult to get the words out.

**Communication under pressure is never easy.** Our hearts beat faster, we get a surge of adrenaline, and start to feel stressed out. This is not a pleasant, especially when the listener keeps placing demands.

This pressure to perform can have a negative impact on anyone! It can be even harder for someone who is not able to speak effectively. **When a person has complex communication needs, excess pressure discourages self expression.** For those learning to use a different method to communicate, it is really hard. When the pressure is high, we cause the person to feel stressed and anxious. We risk making communication feel like work.

Unfortunately, some high tech methods such as AAC are often “taught” in a top down manner. Try to make it a shared learning experience by avoiding the dynamic in which the “instructor” has all the power and tells the learner what to do. Too often, we tell someone what to say on their AAC device.

**There is a better way to encourage communication. Start by taking the pressure off.**

- Make sure the AAC system is available and have a conversation.
- Show by doing. Show the person how to use the device without telling them what to say.
- Offer choices and make comments.
- Take turns on the device.
- Accept and reflect on the messages in whatever manner you receive them.
- Follow their focus, and use their preferences to find a topic to model.
- Have fun and don't worry. You don't have to be perfect. Take the pressure off yourself as well.