

Extra strategies to help communication an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) approach

“Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is any type of communication strategy for people with a range of conditions who have significant difficulties speaking”.

(Speech Pathology Australia)

AAC involves assisting or replacing natural speech and/or writing to maximise effective communication. It may be a strategy that is used temporarily or permanently.

There are two main types of AAC:

1. **Unaided AAC** - Communication techniques that do not require the use of an external aid. That is, the person generally uses their own body to express themselves.

Examples of unaided AAC include:

- eye contact
- facial expression
- body language
- gestures
- manual signing

2. **Aided AAC** - Any external item used to aid communication.

Examples of aided AAC include:

- high technology systems (iPad, tablet, speech generating device)
- low technology systems (real objects, communication books, pen & paper, pictures, and photo)



Why might someone need to use AAC?

- If you are not able speak or express your needs or opinions adequately, you may be able to use a variety of AAC systems to communicate (E.g. unaided and aided)
- If you find it difficult to understand what is being said, AAC can add more visual information to help your understanding.

How is an AAC system developed?

Working out the best AAC systems is a complex process, so often health professionals work together:

1. The Speech Pathologist is the key professional, and will focus on how you communicate and make specific recommendations on AAC systems.
2. An Occupational Therapist will focus on how you can *access (use)* a system
3. A Physiotherapist may provide information regarding seating and positioning.



Following an assessment, a trial period is often conducted to allow you to test out the recommended strategies (E.g. at home, in the workplace, or at a café). It is often recommended that a combination of approaches is used (E.g. unaided and aided strategies) according to your communication environment and your communication partner(s).

Main points to consider with AAC:

- Developing an AAC system is a comprehensive process that often involves a number of specialist health professionals
- The person with the ABI plays a major role in the selection of an AAC system – it is a client-centred process
- AAC does not replace speech or language - it is an approach that encourages the development of spoken language.
- AAC systems and strategies can also help increase a person's understanding of what others are saying
- A person may need a variety of different types of AAC systems to communicate – that is aided (tablet) and unaided (gesture)
- AAC systems grow with the person. They are designed to be an ever-changing option containing up-to-date vocabulary and information specifically for an individual's needs
- The success of the system is heavily influenced by your communication partner's support, training and motivation