



Let's Talk

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

“Shortly after she was born, we found out that our daughter Kim had cerebral palsy. We were told that she would never be able to walk or talk. It was heartbreaking. But her speech-language pathologist told us about some computers and boards that Kim might be able to use to tell us what she wants. She thinks this will give Kim a way to talk to us—finally.”

—Martin and Sue

Does Your Child Have Trouble Speaking?

Many children have a hard time talking. They may be able to speak, but people cannot understand them. Or, they may not be able to speak at all. It can be very upsetting to know that your child wants to talk but can't.

There Are Still Ways to Communicate

People can communicate in many ways besides talking, including:

- Hand signals or sign language
- Gestures like smiling, frowning, or nodding
- Writing
- Using pictures

There are also computers and electronic devices that can spell out words or even say the words out loud. All of these ways to talk are called augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC.

Some children use AAC for a short time until they are able to speak more clearly. Your child can still work on talking even if he uses AAC. It does not have to be one or the other. Sometimes AAC can help your child start talking more.

Fast facts

- There are many ways to communicate besides talking.
- It is important to find the best way to communicate for your child.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.



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An Evaluation Helps

It is important to find a way to communicate that is right for your child. A speech-language pathologist, or SLP, can help.

Your child's SLP may work with other professionals to find out what type of AAC will work best for him. To do that, they need to know how well he can:

- Understand what is said to him
- See pictures or read words
- Move his fingers and hands
- Control other parts of his body

Your child can use AAC even if he can't use his hands to point. He can use other parts of his body, including his eyes. The SLP and other professionals will work with him to learn what part of his body works best.

The SLP also will ask about what you and your child do during the day and what you talk about. It is important to know what your child wants to say with the AAC system.

There Are Many Options

Some AAC systems are simple. These include gestures, sign language, and communication boards. A communication board might have the alphabet on it, so your child can spell out words. A board might have pictures of people, places, or things that she needs to talk about. Some boards already have letters and pictures on them. Or, your SLP may make a board with the words or pictures that you and your child use.

Other AAC systems are more complex. They can be computers or electronic devices. They can store many words and sentences. They may say them out loud or print them for others to read. Your SLP can help figure out what works best for your child.

Often, children will use different devices as they grow and mature.

Getting Your AAC System

Communication boards are not expensive, but some electronic devices are. Your doctor and SLP may have to send information to your insurance company so they will pay for the device. Sometimes you may need to ask other organizations to help pay.



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Deciding What to Say

You and your child will work with the SLP to decide what phrases the device will say. Teachers, family, and friends may also have good ideas about things to say. Your child may want to use jokes or other things that she likes to say. Your child's needs and interests will change as she grows, so the SLP can show you and others how to change or add new messages.

Practice Makes Perfect

After you have decided on an AAC system, you and your child will work with the SLP to practice using it. Your child might only need a little bit of practice to learn to use her system, or she may need more training. As your child goes through school, the teacher or SLP may recommend that she is ready to advance to another system.

“The SLP helped Kim understand how to use pictures to tell us what she wants. So, if she points to a picture of a cup, she gets some juice. Now the SLP has Kim trying an AAC device that says, “I want a drink” when she touches the picture of the cup. Kim gets so excited when she gets what she asked for. We are hopeful that Kim will get even better at using her AAC device and be able someday to tell us stories.”

—Martin and Sue

Augmentative and alternative communication can help your child communicate.

To learn more about AAC or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

Appointment

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