

Augmentative & Alternative Communication Overview

What is Communication?

Any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or nonlinguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes (1992, p.2)

National Joint Committee for the Communicative Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities

What is Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC)?

An area of clinical practice that attempts to compensate (either temporarily or permanently) for the impairment and disability patterns of individuals with severe expressive communication disorders (i.e. the severely speech-language and writing impaired). (ASHA).

AAC includes the use of symbols (picture, word), aide (physical object/device), strategies (indicate from a field of choices), and techniques (gesture, directly select, scan). AAC serves to compensate (temporarily or permanently) for severe expressive communication disorders.

Who is a Candidate for AAC?

- Anyone who is not able to communicate effectively with speech
- Anyone who is partially able to communicate with speech (but speech is not understood by most listeners)
- Anyone who is having difficulty understanding and using oral language.

There are approximately 3 to 5% of special education students who require Augmentative or Alternative Communication. ASHA estimates that 2 million Americans have severe communication impairments that necessitate AAC.

Individuals who need AAC may be:

- Motor & Speech Impaired
- Motor, Speech, & Vision Impaired
- Severely Speech Impaired
- Severely Language Impaired (oral and/or written)
- Developmentally Delayed
- Developmentally Disabled
- Dual sensory impaired

What is an AAC System?

An integrated group of components, including the symbols, aids, strategies, and techniques used by individuals to enhance communication" (ASHA, 1991, p. 10).

Symbol

The methods used for "visual, auditory, and/or tactile representation of conventional concepts (e.g. gestures, photographs, manual sign sets/systems, pictographs, printed words, objects, spoken words, Braille)" (ASHA, 1991, p. 10).

Aid (or Device)

A physical object or device used to transmit or receive messages (e.g. communication book, manual display, chart, mechanical or electronic device, computer)” (ASHA, 1991, p. 10).

Strategy

A specific way of using (AAC) aids, symbols, and/or techniques more effectively for enhanced communication. A strategy, whether taught to an individual or self-discovered, is a plan that can facilitate one’s performance” (ASHA, 1991, p. 10)

Technique

A method of transmitting messages (e.g. linear scanning, row-column scanning, encoding, signing, and natural gesturing)” (ASHA, 1991, p. 10)

Who are Emergent Level AAC Candidates?

Chronologically or developmentally young children who have had limited or no prior exposure to AAC/AT

Who are Entry Level AAC Candidates or Users?

Entry-level system users are demonstrating skills, which indicate readiness for aided communication systems. They utilize unaided communication systems and strategies in an effort to communicate and compensate for their lack of speech. They demonstrate a significant difference between their understanding and their ability to express themselves.

Who are Intermediate Level AAC Users?

Intermediate level system users are demonstrating a moderate level of ability using prestored vocabulary on aided systems of communication. They are resourceful in their use of unaided communication to supplement aided system use. They may have significant motor, linguistic, or cognitive challenges, which limit their ability to use advanced technologies. They have limited ability to generate novel language using text to speech or a word based system.

Who are Advanced Level Users?

Advanced level system users are experienced system users who require high technology systems to enable them to communicate at a level commensurate with their language understanding. Advanced level system users are able to use a large pre-stored vocabulary and generate novel language within their expressive capacity.

