

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

What is augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)?

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) includes all forms of communication, other than oral speech, that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants and ideas. We all use AAC when we make facial expressions or gestures, use symbols or pictures, or write.

Children with severe speech or language problems rely on AAC to supplement existing speech or replace speech that is not functional. Special augmentative aids are available to help children express themselves. These include picture and symbol communication boards and electronic devices.

This may increase social interaction, school performance and feelings of self worth.

AAC users do not stop using speech if they are able to do so. The AAC aids and devices are used to enhance their communication.

Who benefits from AAC?

Communication takes many forms, and people use many ways to communicate. Everyone uses AAC. However, when a child has complex communication needs and their use of speech is limited in a range of settings, AAC can help. Different types of AAC can be used to create a customized system for your child's individual needs and environments.

Limitations in a child's use of speech may be due to many causes, such as:

- Cerebral palsy
- Autism spectrum disorders
- Developmental language delays
- Traumatic brain injury
- Progressive neurological disorders, such as ALS
- Stroke
- Certain genetic disorders
- Apraxia, dyspraxia
- Aphasia
- Multiple challenges
- Temporary medical conditions such as a tracheotomy
- Young children who are at risk for communication disorders

Research and clinical experience show that the use of AAC with children does not block the development of speech. In fact, the use of alternative or augmentative communication often facilitates the development of speech for children who will be able to develop speech. AAC is now used successfully with very young children who are at risk.

1 of 2

To Learn More

- Speech and Language Services
206-987-2104
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



What are the types of AAC systems?

Here are some of the types of AAC's:

Unaided communication systems

These rely on the user's body to convey messages. Examples include gestures, body language and/or sign language.

Aided communication systems

These require the use of tools or equipment in addition to the child's body. Aided communication methods can range from paper and pencil to communication books or boards to devices that produce voice output (speech generative devices or SGD's) or written output. Electronic communication aids allow the child to use picture symbols, letters, and words and phrases to create messages. Some devices can be programmed to produce different spoken languages.

For more information

- American Speech Language Hearing Association asha.org
- International Society for Augmentative Alternative Communication isaac-online.org

To make an appointment

Contact the Speech and Language Department at 206-987-3127.

Reprinted with permission from Augmentative and Alternative Communication. Available from asha.org/public/speech/disorders/AAC.html.

© Copyright 2013 American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. All rights reserved.

"Who Benefits From AAC", reproduced in its entirety with the expressed written permission of ISAAC, the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication.

Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

© 2019 Seattle Children's, Seattle, Washington. All rights reserved.