

## Augmentative and alternative communication

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is when a person uses something other than speech to communicate.

They might use **body movements** or **gestures**.

They might use **sign language** or a **computer** or **device**. They might use **communication books** or other printed material.

### People who use AAC

Many people use AAC to communicate.

This includes people who have:

- **autism** or **intellectual disability**
- **motor difficulties** such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy
- disability caused by **stroke** or another **neurological condition**.

Some people use AAC to help others understand them when they talk.

They may use AAC when they talk to people they don't know, or when they're in a new environment.

Others only use AAC for a short time, for example after surgery.

### Understanding AAC

Every AAC system is different because every person is different.

People who use AAC personalise their system to suit them. Some people use more than one type of AAC. This is called **multimodal communication**.

Using an AAC system will not stop a child from developing spoken language, or an adult from using whatever speech they can. In fact, using an AAC system can help them develop spoken language.

Anyone of any ability can learn AAC, from babies to older adults.

Using AAC is more than just finding the right system. AAC users also need help to develop their new visual language. They need to learn how to use their system in different situations.

AAC users build their communication skills over time. These skills include learning how to:

- make more **complex messages**
- **navigate** their AAC
- communicate in **social situations** without speech
- manage the **challenges of non-verbal communication**.

### Types of AAC

Your speech pathologist can help you decide which type of AAC is right for you. These include:

- **speech generating devices** – these devices are built for people who use AAC. You can input language in different ways, and the device converts it into speech
- **mainstream devices** – you can put communication apps on devices like tablets and phones to help you communicate
- **paper-based systems** – these are books with symbols, pictures or words that help you communicate
- **signing** – signing systems include Auslan and Key Word Sign
- **alternative access systems** – you use these systems with eye movements, switches or help from someone else
- **informal AAC** – everyone who uses AAC will use some form of informal AAC, such as gestures, movements or actions
- **AAC in the environment** – this helps people understand and participate in specific tasks, and it may include visual timetables, first/then boards and other visual support.

## How speech pathologists help with AAC

Speech pathologists can help you find the right AAC for you. They can also help you learn to use it.

This includes working with you to:

- explore different AAC systems before deciding on which is right for you
- get more out of the system you are already using
- use alternative access methods such as eye-gaze, use of switches or help from someone else
- learn the new visual language
- keep track of the informal ways you communicate, so you can communicate better with people you don't know
- teach your family and friends ways to help you communicate better using AAC.

Your speech pathologist will work with you to boost your communication so you can participate in all areas of life.