

Helping AAC Users Communicate

AAC users and their communication partners often need assistance connecting with each other. How can we help the AAC users we know to communicate better? Here are a few ideas:

1. **Honor all forms of communication.** Speech, facial expressions, gestures, sign language, symbols, and communication devices together make up an individual's communication system. We should try to encourage efficient, understandable, and socially acceptable communication in all forms. Accept a spoken word (or approximation of a word) or a gesture even if that same message is programmed on the communication device. Later you can teach use of the device in case another communication partner does not understand the speech or gesture.
2. **Teach new vocabulary.** Young children add words to their vocabulary daily. Adults add new words to their vocabulary too depending on current events, job responsibilities, or interests. Too often we add vocabulary to an individual's communication device very slowly. In addition, we might teach only a fraction of what has already been programmed into the device. Help AAC users communicate better by introducing them to new words that are relevant to their daily activities and needs.
3. **Have fun!** Communication does not need to be serious all the time. Make sure the AAC users can joke, chat, tell stories, and express their personalities. Teaching better communication does not need to be serious either. Incorporate teaching into games, fun activities, and interesting environments.