

Your Child's AAC Device: How to Get Off to a Good Start

PARENT GUIDE

An augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device can help your child overcome the physical or cognitive challenges impacting their ability to communicate.

Using the device can open up a world of spontaneous, independent, and interactive communication.



Parents new to AAC have many questions about using a device, from basic operation to questions about introducing a device to a child, helping them use it, and making the device part of the child's everyday life.

This guide shares recommendations on the first steps of using an AAC device, so you and your child can get off to a good start.

How to Help Your Child Begin Using an AAC Device

1. Set Up the Device

- Review the contents of the box. Check that all items ordered are enclosed.
- Attach any accessories to the device.
- Turn on the device. If it needs to be charged, plug it in and begin charging.
- Set the device to the vocabulary recommended by the speech-language pathologist (SLP) or evaluation team.
- Choose a voice for the device (male, female, age, etc.).
- Set and adjust the access method (such as eye-gaze or switch-scanning) so your child can make selections on the device accurately and efficiently.
- Contact the device manufacturer and ask if there is a local consultant in your area. Regional consultants often provide training on device setup, operation, and implementation.
- Inform your child's SLP and teachers that the device has arrived.

As with any new technology, consult the manufacturer's guide that accompanies the device to learn proper handling and cleaning methods, how to set up the device for optimal functioning, and more.



2. Familiarize Yourself with the Device

You will be your child's best teacher and most consistent AAC partner and advocate in the months and years ahead. It's important that you understand how the device works and become comfortable using it so you can confidently support your child:

- Learn how language is organized on the device. Once you know where nouns, verbs, adjectives, and other parts of speech are stored, you can help your child locate them and also program new words. Practice putting two- and three-word combinations together so you can teach your child how to combine words.
- Explore the device's pre-stored words and phrases. Personalize the vocabulary by adding names of family members, friends, pets, and favorite places, as well as routine messages. Always back up the vocabulary.
- Explore any Help or other support programs built into your device, such as Vocabulary Builder, Word Finder, or Icon Tutor.

What's in the Box?

Your shipment should contain:

- Your child's AAC device
- Owner's manual and/or Getting Started guide
- Charger
- Information on free trial subscriptions

Plus any accessories you have purchased, such as:

- Keyguards
- Keyboard
- Switches
- Mouse
- Eye-gaze module
- USB flash drive

If you ordered a wheelchair or table mount, these may be shipped separately.

Keep the Box! You may need to ship the device back to the manufacturer and some warranties require shipping returns in the original box.

3. Start Simply with Your Child

Once you are familiar with using the device, introduce it to your child in small, measured steps and then build upon his or her success. Keep your initial interactions fun and low-key. Your child may need time to get accustomed to having the device around.

For the first week or two, consider practicing on the device together just once a day at the same pre-determined time, such as at breakfast, snack time, or before bed.

Start by showing your child how to say one or two words on the device. Have your child practice saying those words in the appropriate context or situation. For example:

- In the morning, have your child select the color of shirt he or she will wear that day;
- Have your child say “good morning” at breakfast or “good night” at bedtime;
- At snack time, have your child choose “apple” or “cookie;”
- While reading a book to your child, use the device to make comments like “sad” or “happy” to talk about what’s happening in the story.

Always respond naturally when your child communicates using the device. If your child says “read,” begin to read a book. If your child says “off” at bedtime, shut the lights off. When you respond to your child’s communication, he or she will experience how powerful words are and how rewarding communicating can be.

Accept all forms of communication your child uses – gestures, facial expressions, and intelligible verbalizations. If you understand what is being communicated, don’t insist that your child “say it on your device.” But if you don’t understand, prompt use of the device by asking, “Can you tell me this way?”

As your child becomes more comfortable on the device, choose topics of particular interest to him or her to teach new vocabulary words and progress toward fuller communication and interactive conversations.



4. Engage Your Child’s Support Team

If possible, arrange a “team training” that includes your child’s complete support team – the SLP, classroom teachers, occupational and physical therapists, and any others – so all team members understand how the device works and why it is important to encourage its use across all daily activities.

If group training cannot be arranged, try to meet individually to acquaint support team members with the device and your child’s communication goals.

5. Be Patient, Stay Positive, and Expect Success

Learning to use an AAC device requires dedication, time, and lots of practice, so don’t let yourself or your child get discouraged.

Your child’s SLP, support team, and the device manufacturer’s regional consultant can answer your questions about AAC and help you and your child overcome any stumbling blocks. Be sure to make use of any demo software or online training opportunities provided by the device’s manufacturer.

With help from an AAC device, your child can achieve their full communication potential!

AAC Devices & Everyday Family Life: 4 Keys to Success

Keep it Handy: Children will spontaneously use AAC devices if devices are charged, turned on, and accessible. Do NOT allow your child's device to be left in a backpack or put away in a closet. Make sure the device is always available, whether mounted on a wheelchair or on the kitchen table or a night stand.

Keep it Fun: Encourage device use during activities that are meaningful and enjoyable. Don't push too hard or too fast. You don't want your child to see the device as something that makes life harder.

Keep it Up: Becoming a proficient AAC user requires frequent device use and practice. Encourage your child to use the device and give them the support and professional help they need to achieve success.

Say It with Your AAC Device!

Select a food or drink



Ask mum or dad for help



Tell the dog what to do

Tease a brother or sister

Describe the weather



Comment on the news

Request to go to the bathroom



Voice an opinion

Tell a joke

Work on homework



Say good morning or good night



Play a game

Additional Resources for Parents

AAC Language Lab

aaclanguagelab.com

Free educational resources and teaching aids to support language development, vocabulary acquisition, and effective AAC use.

The Center for AAC and Autism

aacandautism.com

Online resource dedicated to building awareness of the power of AAC to change the lives of children with autism and other developmental disabilities that limit communication skills.

Realize Language

realizelanguage.com

Online service that gives parents and professionals powerful ways to monitor, measure, and maximize a child's use of an AAC device.

Speech Pathology Australia

speechpathologyaustralia.com.au

The national professional association for more than 7800 members who are speech-language pathologists.



About Liberator

Liberator is a world-leading supplier of products, training and support for communication, inclusion and independence.

Our aim is to help you achieve the best communication possible for the people you support, whatever their age or ability.

In addition to powerful AAC devices, Liberator provides teaching and implementation ideas, therapy materials, curriculum sequences, funding assistance, and training to speech-language pathologists, special educators, and the families of people who communicate with AAC.

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