

WHAT IS AAC?

<https://communicationmatters.org.uk/what-is-aac/overview/>

AAC stands for Augmentative and Alternative Communication

AAC is used to mean many different ways to help someone communicate.

It could be simple things like pointing, signing, writing or drawing.

It could also be using a special device like a machine that 'speaks' words for you.

Devices that help people communicate are called 'aids'.

People with speech difficulties use AAC most of the time.

AAC helps people to communicate in all different situations.

Insurance

You may have to insure your communication aid against loss, theft or damage.

Training and keeping up to date

People need support and to learn how to use communication aids.

Carers and professionals need training to be able to provide this support.

Getting an assessment

An assessment is where you work with a speech and language therapist and other professionals to choose the best communication aid for you.

A speech and language therapist is a health professional who is trained to help people to communicate.

Usually you have to contact your local speech and language therapy service.

Children and young people may get help to find a speech and language therapist through their school.

The speech and language therapist can give you advice about how to pay for your communication aid.

NHS England has a system for providing communication aids.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own systems.

[Learn more.](#)

Companies that provide equipment or services

We have a code of conduct for companies that provide equipment and services. This means there are rules about how they work.

They can:

- Show you how different aids work
- Let you borrow an aid to try out
- Make changes to an aid so that it is right for you
- Give you training in how to use the aid

Some companies can lend you an aid to see if it the right one for you.

Different types of Communication Aid

No-tech

No-tech communication is where you can communicate without using a device or aid.

It might be by pointing, gestures or sign language

Low-tech communication systems

Low-tech communication systems do not need power to work.

They use basic equipment, like pen and paper, word boards or books with pictures.

Hi-tech communication systems

Hi-tech communication systems use batteries or mains power.

Most gadgets or computers speak or produce text.

Some are based on mobile phones, tablets or laptops.

Some 'speak' words when you press buttons, keys, or a touchscreen.

You may be able to operate them with your head, or your eyes.

Frequently asked questions

Do you have to be able to read and spell?

You don't have to be able to read and spell.

Many aids use pictures or photos to help you to communicate.

What is the best AAC system to use?

You have to find the system that is right for you.

Many people use a few different AAC tools. They choose a different one for different situations.

What if someone can't press keys?

There are different ways to work your device. You could have a keyboard. But you could also have a pointer, a switch, or a way of controlling it using your eyes.

How can someone get the right AAC system?

You should get good advice from a professional.

Start by contacting your local speech and language therapy service.

Have a look at our AAC E-Learning website!

This website is free and gives you a good introduction to AAC.

Having a conversation with an AAC user

Many people are worried about talking with an AAC user for the first time. Here are some ideas that might help:

Where to do it

- Choose a quiet place so you can concentrate on the conversation

- Face the person you are talking with
- Everyone communicates in a different way. Start off by asking if they need anything to help them have a good conversation with you

Getting started

It takes more time to have a conversation with an AAC user. Be ready to give them the time they need.

- Make eye contact and speak directly with the AAC user, not their assistant.
- Let them know if you have never listened to an AAC user before in a conversation
- Start talking about something easy
- When you ask a question please wait for a reply
- Keep your own speech short and simple. It gives them a chance to speak.
- Don't finish off the person's sentence for them.

Longer conversations

- Take the time to make sure you have understood the person. You could tell them what you think they said – to make sure you understand it right

- Try to talk about only one thing at once
- Make it clear if you are moving on to talk about something else
- Give the person time to ask you questions
- Only ask one question at a time
- Give the person time to answer
- Don't ask questions that only need a "yes" or "no", it's boring for everyone!

What if you don't understand each other?

If the person looks confused, check that they have understood. You could ask "Did you mean...?" or "Could you say that again?"

If you get really lost, ask them "Who are we talking about?" or "What situation are we talking about?"

Ending a conversation

- When a conversation is slow, it can feel like hard work. You may feel tired. It is fine to say if you need a break.
- Some people find using their device tiring. If they are getting tired you could suggest they take a break

- If you need to finish the conversation, you should say so clearly and politely

Last thoughts

The more you have conversations with AAC users, the better you will become.

AAC users want to talk to you; they understand how you feel and will help you all they can.