

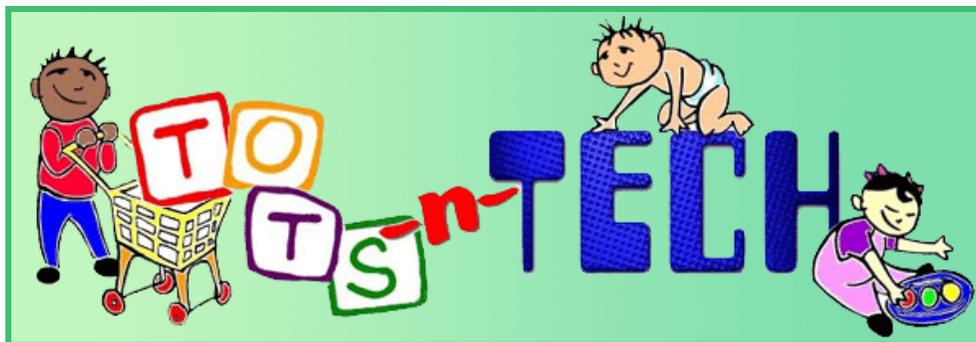


Center on Technology and Disability
www.CTDinstitute.org

Augmentative and Alternative Communication-AAC

Re-published with permission from
Tots-n-Tech
Newsletter – March 2009





Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC): The Basics

In this issue:

What is Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)?

The term AAC typically refers to an area where the focus is impairments in communication. An AAC system is a combination of strategies, techniques, symbols, and aids that increase the user's ability to communicate effectively with those around them.

AAC systems can fall into two categories, unaided and aided communication. Unaided communication doesn't require any extra equipment. It can include sign language, body language, gestures, facial expressions, etc. Aided communication means that an external device is needed to communicate. This can include objects, drawings, charts, voice output systems, and much more. Although most children will use both unaided and aided communication, this newsletter will focus on aided communication using low-tech (non-electronic) devices.

Why is AAC important?

The ability to communicate effectively is an extremely important part of life. It allows us to interact with others and participate in daily activities. When a child's communication is not effective, frustration can occur for both the child and the people with whom interactions occur. Providing a child with an AAC system provides a way to communicate that is based on each child's specific abilities, which can be as simple as looking at different objects or pointing to a picture. For children whose verbal and nonverbal language are impaired, AAC can boost their participation, increase interest in activities and attention during tasks, improve vocabulary, build literacy skills and give them control over their environment!

What are some ways that a child can communicate using AAC?

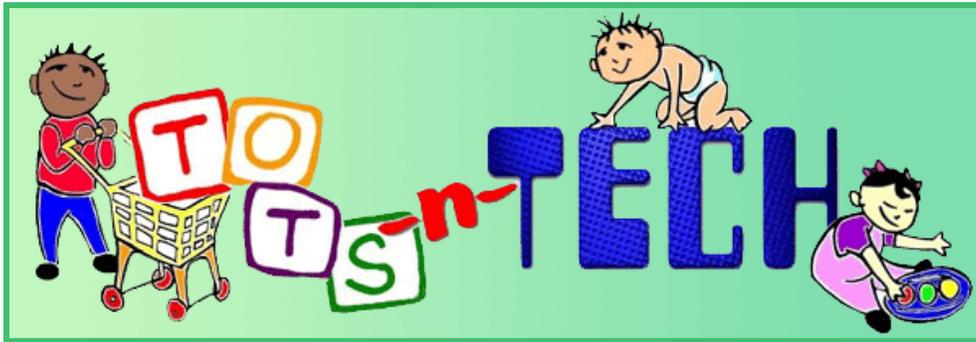
Anything from actual objects to text may be used to promote communication. Once a child begins to understand more abstract concepts you can introduce new ways of representing vocabulary. Below is a list of ideas:

- The actual object
- Pieces of the object
- Miniatures of the object
- Photos of the actual object
- Pictures from magazines
- Drawings
- Textured symbols
- Icons to represent objects or events as symbols; can have multiple meanings in different contexts
- Text

AAC: The Basics	1
AAC: Low-Tech Devices	2-3
AAC: Direct Selection Techniques	4
AAC: Things to Consider	4
Using AAC During Activities and Routines	5-6
AAC: Tips	7
AAC: Helpful Websites	7
AAC: Ideas to Share	8



Communication begins at birth, it is never too early to introduce AAC into a child's life!



A A C : L o w - t e c h d e v i c e s



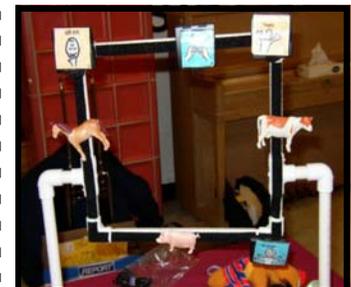
- **Communication Board** - A display with pictures, symbols, or objects of vocabulary that are familiar to the child. The board can be made out of cardboard, clear coupon holders, foam, etc. Objects (or representations) may be attached with Velcro, tape, or magnets. To use a board, children choose an object, picture, or symbol to let others know what they want to say.
- **How Does It Help?** - Communication boards allow children to communicate with adults and peers using familiar words and phrases.

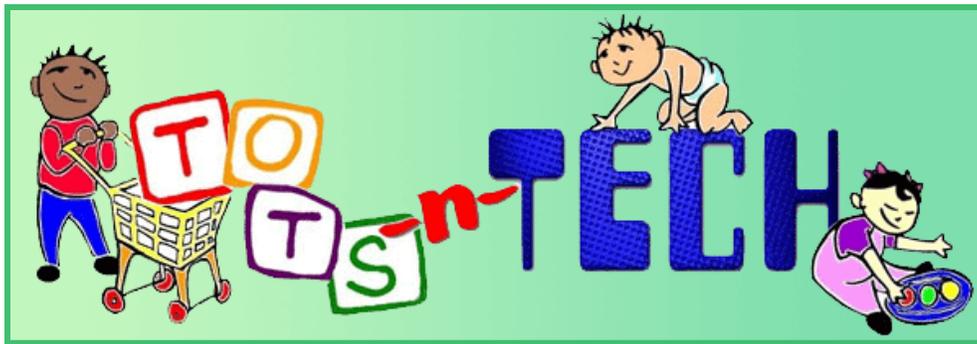
- **Communication Vest/Apron**—Similar to a communication board, symbols, pictures or objects are attached to a vest or apron via Velcro. An adult wears the vest and faces the child, pointing to the object or picture when talking to the child, and allowing the child to select a symbol.
- **How Does It Help?** - Communication vests allow children to communicate with adults and peers using familiar words and phrases.



- **Portable Communication Devices**—Small and light weight communication devices that can be taken anywhere! These may include symbols attached to key chains, communication cans, and communication books. This type of communication device works in the same way as communication boards—children choose an object, picture, or symbol to let others know what they want to say.
- **How Does It Help?** - Portable communication devices allow children to communicate with adults and peers using familiar words and phrases, no matter where they go!

- **Eye gaze frame**—A clear display with symbols around the frame. The child sits on one side of the frame and the adult sits on the other side, facing the child. The child uses their eyes to make a selection from the frame.
- **How Does It Help?** - An eye gaze frame allows children with significant physical disabilities to communicate with adults and peers by selecting pictures or symbols representing what they want to say by looking at the symbol. .



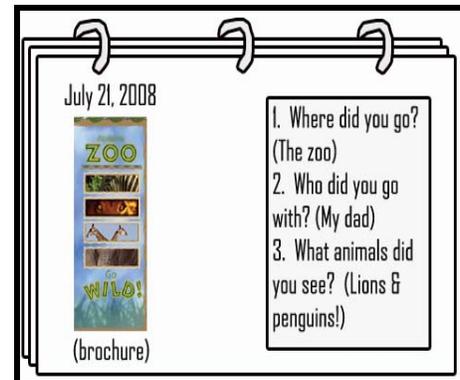


A A C : L o w - t e c h d e v i c e s

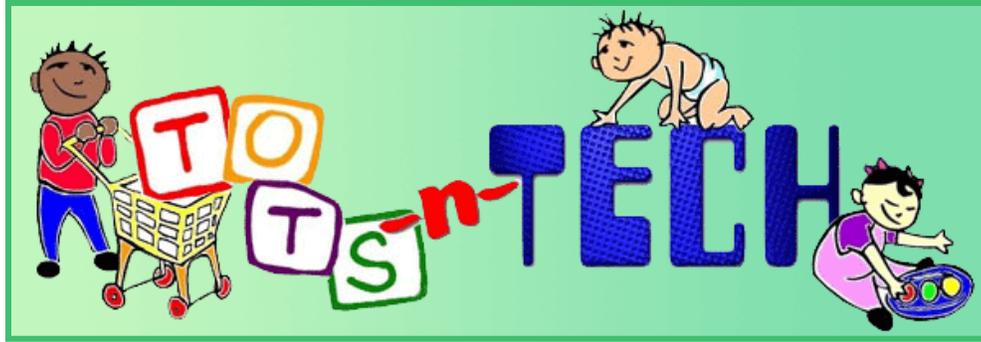


- **Language Stimulation Board**— This is a great way to stimulate a child’s language development and introduce new symbols! The board contains vocabulary and phrases that are used during specific activities and routines. Adults and peers use the board to model language by pointing to pictures of the word or phrase they are using.
- **How Does It Help?** Language stimulation boards allow parents and peers to teach children language by introducing new vocabulary and phrases during everyday activities and routines.

- **Remnant Book**—A notebook with folders or page protectors is used for this device. When the children participate in an activity that they would like to talk about, a ‘portion’ of the activity is put into the folder with a note explaining what it is and questions other children or adults can ask.
- **How Does It Help?** Remnant books allow children to initiate conversation with adults and peers and talk about things that are not immediately present in the environment.



- **Visual Schedule**—A display with pictures of activities placed in the order that they will be completed.
- **How Does It Help?** - Visual schedules help children transition between activities by anticipating things that will happen in the future.



A A C : D e v i c e S e l e c t i o n T e c h n i q u e s

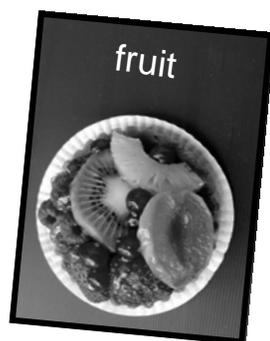
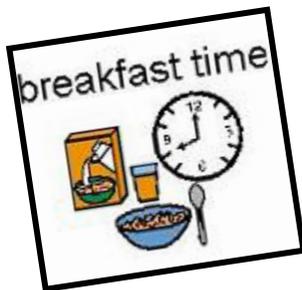
Children may select words and phrases to communicate to others using a variety of different methods. These methods can fall into 2 main categories, *scanning* and *direct selection*. To use *scanning*, the adult or peer points to each word or phrase, one at a time. The child signals when the word s/he wants to use is pointed to by the adult/peer. To use *direct selection*, the child points to or looks directly at the picture/object. A child may point with a finger or any other body part that can be controlled reliably. A pointer may also be attached to a headband or a mouth piece. Instead of a pointer, a light source can be attached to a head piece allowing the child to select words and phrases using light.

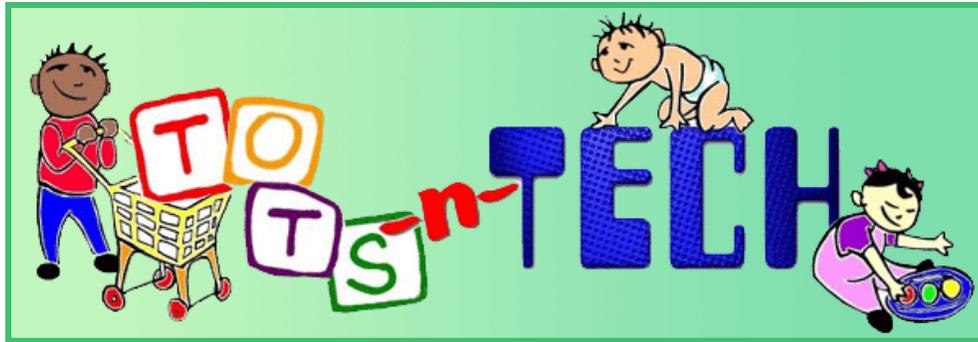
A A C : T h i n g s t o C o n s i d e r

- Child's abilities—Be sure to assess motor and problem solving abilities, vision, etc. and make sure that the AAC system is designed to match and extend children's abilities.
- Child's communication abilities—Does the child already have a reliable way of communicating some words and/or phrases? Build the AAC system around what the child can already communicate.
- Portability—Children communicate everywhere, not just at home! Make sure to include a portable communication component in the AAC system.
- Durability—The communication device (especially the portable kind) will go wherever the child goes, make sure it can withstand the elements!
- Flexibility—Can the system be changed as the child's interests expand or communication becomes more complex?
- Symbols—How will the message be represented? What kind of symbols will have meaning for the child?

Here are some questions to consider:

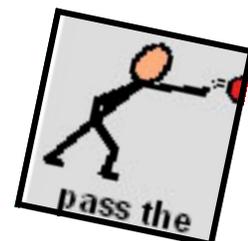
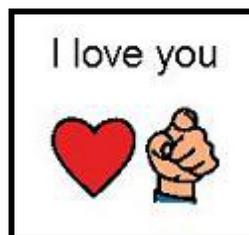
- Should the symbols be in black and white or in color?
- How big should they be?
- Should they have texture?
- Should they include objects, pictures, drawings, text, or combinations of these things?

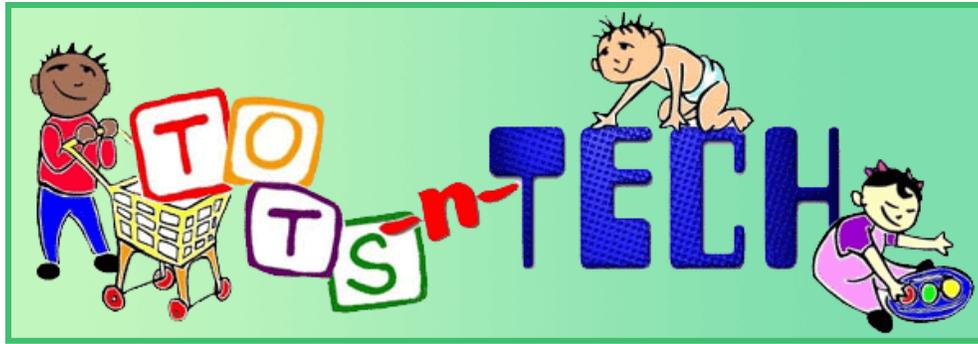




Using Low-Tech AAC During Activities & Routines

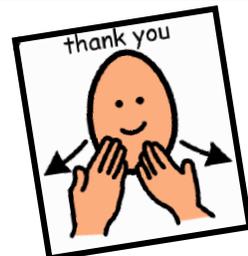
Morning Routine	Mealtimes	Indoor Play	Evening Routine	Errands
Have your child pick out clothes in the morning by selecting pictures of clothing items from a communication device.	Use a device with symbols for food and drink choices, "Pass the...", "Please", "Thank you", "I'm full"	Use a communication device that lets the child choose what game to play or what to do during play – e.g., read a book, play with a toy, etc.	Have your child pick out their PJs or a story book or videotape by selecting items from a communication device.	Use a communication key chain during errands to communicate with your child.
Use a visual schedule of your morning activities (getting out of bed, getting dressed, eating breakfast), so your child can anticipate what activities will happen. Keep the schedule by the child's bed as a reminder.	Talk to your child while making or eating dinner using a language stimulation board or communication board. Point to symbols or pictures of food to describe what you are making or what s/he is eating.	Use a device with symbols for "your turn", "my turn", "I'm having fun", "let's play a different game", "time to clean up", etc.	Ask the child which activity to do first (putting on PJs, brushing teeth, reading a story) to select the order of the evening routine activities.	Make a communication board using common items found at the grocery store and bring it with you on shopping trips. Have your child search for these items and point them out to you while you shop.
Use a device with symbols for "Good morning", "How are you?", and "Have a good day."	Use a remnant book to communicate with your child about what s/he did during the day.	Create symbols for children's songs such as Old McDonald or Wheels on the Bus. Sing the song while pointing to the corresponding symbols.	Create symbols for nursery rhymes or children's books. Read the story while pointing to the corresponding symbols.	Use a device with symbols for where you are going - grocery store, shoe store, library, etc.

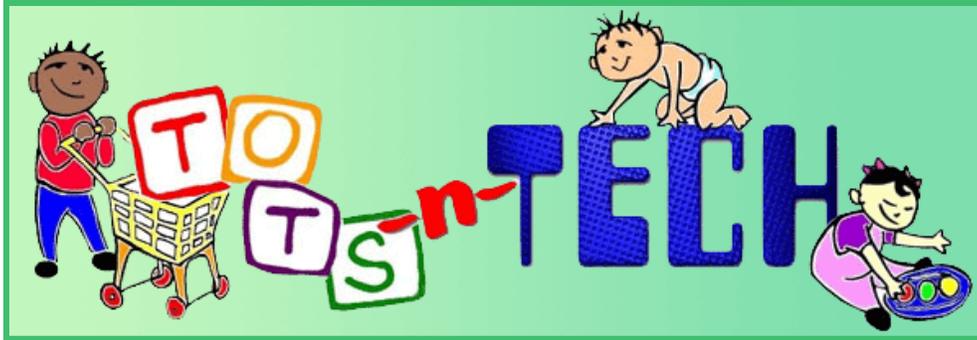




Using Low-Tech AAC During Activities & Routines

Outdoor Play	Bath Time	Leaving the House	Family Outings	Chores
Use a device with symbols for "Tag, you're it!", "Push me higher!", or "I'm chilly."	Create a floating communication board (see Ideas to Share) so your child can communicate during bath time.	Use a device with symbols for "Good bye", "Have a good day", "I'll miss you", "I forgot something."	Use pictures of family members or symbols to represent them on an AAC device so your child can communicate with others by name.	Create a visual schedule of the simple steps involved in each chore.
Create a visual schedule using pictures of the equipment your child uses at the playground to help them transition from one type of equipment to another.	Waterproof symbols with laminate, plastic, etc. and stick them to the bathtub wall with suction cups.	Use a device with symbols for where you are going or where the child might like to go - park, playground, zoo, etc.	Going to a restaurant with your child? Check out the menu before hand and make a customized communication device with pictures of food that your child might like to eat.	Use a device with symbols for "All done", "What should I do next?", or "Can you help me?".
When a child needs to communicate during outdoor play, use a communication device that can be attached to the child (e.g., wrist band; bracelet; fanny pack) so holding onto the communication device is not necessary.	Using a communication board, ask the child which activity they'd like to do first (brush their teeth, take a bath) to let her select the order of the bath time routine.	Let your child lead you through your leaving the house routine by creating a visual schedule. Have the child 'remind' you of what to do by pointing to the pictures of what is next (turn off the lights, open the door, shut the door, lock the door) as they happen.	Bring pictures of things the child might see (a brown dog or a bicycle). Have the child keep an eye out for each item. Ask them to point to symbols when s/he sees the object.	To have your child help with chores, use a device with symbols of tasks that can be completed from which the child can choose what to do.





A A C : T i p s

- The best AAC systems include a variety of communication methods. If the child already has a good way of indicating yes or no, don't change it!
- Make sure to talk to everyone who knows the child so that what the CHILD wants to say (not what the adults want the child to say) is represented.
- Make sure the system is useful to the child – can allow the child to participate with friends, adults and across various situations.
- Think of ALL the vocabulary a child might need to express him- or herself in specific routines and activities
- Vocabulary should include messages such as “no,” “go away,” “I don’t want that”
- Use separate communication boards for separate routines/activities
- Start with a blank board and add to it so the child does not get overwhelmed
- Use textured objects with kids who can’t rely on their vision to make choices

A A C : H e l p f u l W e b s i t e s

There are LOTS of websites that can help you learn more about AAC, here are just a few.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Connecting Young Kids (YAACK) (<http://aac.unl.edu/yaack/toc.html>) - This website is especially geared towards young children. AAC basics are covered along with selecting a system and teaching children how to use their system.

Resources about Picture Symbols, AAC, PECS & More! (<http://www.givinggreetings.com/learn.html>) - A very long list of AAC resources from Giving Greetings.

PictureSET (<http://setbc.org/pictureset/Default.aspx>) - downloadable symbols, schedules, and games to use in the community, at home, at school, or anywhere else you might go!

Do2Learn (<http://www.dotolearn.com/>) - another great resource for activities, games, symbols, schedules, and much more. These resources can either be used online or downloaded.

AAC Service Delivery with Children: Twenty Frequently Asked Questions (<http://www.unl.edu/barkley/present/cress/questions.shtml>) - Answers to common questions asked by parents and providers.

Thomas Jefferson
University

March 2009



Arizona State
University

E-Newsletter

A A C : I d e a s t o S h a r e

Here is a communication idea from our Ideas to Share database. See the website (http://www.asu.edu/clas/tnt/home_files/ideas/communication/communication.html) for more great ideas!

Floating Communication Board: An easy waterproof communication board that can float in the pool, bath, or water table.

From: D.E.S.K. (Designing Environments for Successful Kids), Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (WATI), CESA 2, 448 E. High St., Milton, WI 53563, Phone 608-758-6232 X 340 or 800-991-5576, Email: info@wati.org



Materials:

Foam garden kneeler (one with a cut out handle works best for the pool)
Communication Board printed out on card stock
Laminate or Con-Tact paper (Laminate holds up longer)
Large baggie with zip lock seals (size needs to fit around the communication board)
2 sticky back Velcro strips (both hook and loop) cut to width of garden kneeler

Instructions:

Create and laminate communication board. Put in baggie and seal, pushing excess air out so it lays flat. Place the look Velcro on the kneeler and the hook on the backside of the baggie. Make sure the pictures on the communication board are facing up. Attach the baggie to the kneeler.

Do you have an AAC idea that you'd like to share with others? Submit your idea with a picture and description, we'll put it on our website as a part of our Ideas to Share. To submit your idea, or if you have any questions, send an email to jill.mcleod@jefferson.edu.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to any individuals or agencies that may benefit from information on assistive technology.

Questions? Comments? Concerns? Want to have the newsletter sent directly to your mailbox? Email Jill at jill.mcleod@jefferson.edu