

# AAC Parent/ Caregiver Resource Packet

## A Guide for Families

### Supporting your Child's Communication at Home

This packet was put together to help you feel more confident supporting your child's communication using AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication). You don't need to be a speech therapist to make a big difference. The strategies in these pages are simple, practical, and designed for everyday life at home.

Each section focuses on one area. You can read them in order or flip to whichever feels most relevant to where you are right now. There is no pressure to do everything at once.

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Have questions or want personalized guidance? The AbleNet SLP Empowerment Team offers free support to families navigating AAC. You can schedule a meeting with one of their speech-language pathologists at any time.

Schedule a meeting with the AbleNet SLP Empowerment Team  
→ [go.oncehub.com/ablecareslp](https://go.oncehub.com/ablecareslp)



# AAC Implementation Tips

## 10 Tips for Supporting AAC Implementation

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- 1 Assume Everyone Has Potential** - Believe that each person possesses the innate capacity to learn, connect, communicate, hone literacy skills, and make a positive impact in society. Foster this belief by offering a comprehensive AAC system, literacy teachings, and showcasing AAC techniques as early and frequently as possible. Remember, it's never too late to start!
- 2 Always Demonstrate AAC in Action!** Infants grasp spoken language through consistent exposure and numerous models. AAC users are no different. Enhance their learning by speaking while pointing to corresponding symbols on the AAC device. It's okay to model just a few key words from your sentence. And as you grow more adept, your modeled phrases can exceed the AAC user's typical word length by 1-2 words. Note: There's a clear distinction between prompting (encouraging someone to speak) and modeling (serving as an example). By modeling AAC, we impart the significance of symbols and facilitate language growth without obliging a specific response that might not echo the communicator's intentions.
- 3 Don't Let Perfect be the Enemy of Good!** It is O.K. if you don't know everything about implementing AAC. The implementation process is often as unique as the AAC user. Learning alongside the user can often strengthen the bond between clinician and user. Don't know where a specific button/ folder is? That can be the perfect time to model your frustration before resuming your search! When you find what you were looking for... model how you good it made you feel!
- 4 Prompt with Care** - While our instinct is to assist and fill silences, over-helping can foster dependency and send unintended messages. Be cautious about how you encourage AAC learners to speak. Refrain from dictating their words. Also, hand-over-hand prompting can lead to unwanted behaviors, so use an AAC prompt hierarchy if uncertain.
- 5 Engage Rather Than Examine** - Individuals with complex communication needs often feel restricted in many life facets. Making language feel like a chore or test can be discouraging. Always ask, "Am I teaching language or merely testing?" Keep it engaging! TIP: Starting sentences with phrases like "Maybe" or "I wonder" is beneficial. For instance, you could express, "You seem agitated. Perhaps you're angry?" while displaying the relevant emotion and corresponding AAC symbol. This way, you're offering an interpretation without assuming or expecting a reaction.
- 6 Be Patient; Wait Longer** - Many AAC users need extra time for comprehension and response formulation. Even though the urge to interject can be strong, be patient. Silently count and wait for a good 10-15 seconds before intervening. During this pause, maintain an encouraging gaze, indicating your anticipation and respect for their input.
- 7 Promote All Language Functions, Not Merely Requests** - For comprehensive communication—from expressing needs to forming connections—we must master every language function. Thus, AAC learners should not only be taught to request but also to comment, describe, inquire, protest, defend their stand, and more.
- 8 Tailor AAC Systems to the User** - For daily tools like AAC systems, personalization is key. Customizations might encompass vocabulary choice, visual themes, auditory settings, icons, language layout, voice selection, accessibility features, and more. Always aim for a blend of core vocabulary, specific phrases, and an integrated keyboard. Additionally, prioritize involving the AAC user in any customization processes.
- 9 Allow Ample Time for Language Absorption** - Typically developing children take years to perfect their language skills. It's unjust to expect AAC learners to become fluent immediately upon receiving their system. Recognizing the unique learning curves of individuals with complex communication needs, it's essential to allocate even more time and resources for their linguistic growth.
- 10 Cultivate a Supportive Environment** Encourage those around the AAC user, like family, friends, and educators, to learn and use AAC effectively. Provide training and support to ensure everyone can communicate inclusively. Collaboration and inclusivity amplify the AAC user's communication experience. AAC should be integrated into daily interactions and routines for maximum effectiveness.

# Aided Language Stimulation:

## Supporting Early Intervention and Building AAC Skills Through Modeling

One of the best ways to support language in early intervention is to create a language rich environment, and it's no different for children using AAC! Research shows that the earlier children are exposed to their communication system, the better their long-term language outcomes (*Romski et al., 2010*). Think about how children learn to talk. They hear thousands of words before they say their first word. Children using AAC need the same rich exposure and consistent models to their AAC system from an early age.

### What is Aided Language Stimulation?

Aided Language Stimulation (ALS), often referred to as modeling, is an evidence-based strategy where communication partners model language using an AAC system while speaking naturally (*Goossens, 1989*).

### The Aided Language Stimulation technique:

1. Speak the complete sentence naturally - don't change how you normally talk
2. Point to 1-2 key words on the AAC device while you speak
3. No pressure or expectations - don't require the child to respond or imitate

### “ Why Aided Language Stimulation Works:

Research demonstrates children who receive early, consistent aided language stimulation develop **stronger receptive language skills, better understanding of communication functions, and more robust expressive language abilities** over time (*Drager et al., 2006; Binger & Light, 2007*).



#### Snack

“I want more snack”  
(Point to WANT + MORE)



#### Caregiving

“Let's put on shoes”  
(Point to PUT + SHOES)



#### Transitions

“Time to go home”  
(Point to GO + HOME)



#### Play

“My turn to build!”  
(Point to MY + TURN)



#### Reading

“The bear is big”  
(Point to BIG + BEAR)



# Tips for Success



## DO:

- Provide aided language stimulation frequently throughout the day
- Model various communication functions (commenting, requesting, protesting, greeting)
- Use the AAC device yourself as you communicate with the child
- Start with high-interest activities and preferred items
- Focus on core vocabulary that can be used across situations
- Be patient and consistent - learning takes time
- Celebrate all communication attempts, not just AAC use
- Ensure the device is always accessible and positioned appropriately

## DON'T:

- Say “You say it,” “Touch the button,” or give direct prompts
- Withhold desired items until AAC is used
- Turn every interaction into a teaching opportunity
- Expect immediate imitation or responses
- Get discouraged if progress seems slow

## Remember: Input comes before output

- Children typically understand AAC before they use it
- Your child may watch and listen for weeks or months before trying
- Small signs of progress count (looking at the device, touching it, etc.)
- Every child learns at their own pace
- Consistent modeling is more important than perfect modeling

**Trust the process!** Just like learning to walk or talk, learning AAC takes time and lots of practice seeing it used.

## References

- Binger, C., & Light, J. (2007). The effect of aided AAC modeling on the expression of multi-symbol messages by preschoolers who use AAC. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 23(1), 30-43.
- Drager, K. D., et al. (2006). The effect of aided language modeling on symbol comprehension and production in 2 preschoolers with autism. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 15(2), 112-125.
- Goossens, C. (1989). Aided communication intervention before assessment: A case study of a child with cerebral palsy. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 5(1), 14-26.
- Ronski, M. A., et al. (2010). Randomized trial of augmented and non-augmented language interventions for toddlers with developmental delays. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 53(2), 350-364.

# Incorporating AAC into Daily Routines

- ✓ **Assess and identify the individual's daily activities.**

Work with families, classroom staff, and anyone who is with the individual daily to establish and identify routines that may provide opportunities for them to communicate with their device.

Examples of Daily Routines

  - Getting dressed
  - Eating breakfast/lunch/snack/dinner
  - Going to a family member's house
  - Going to school
- ✓ **Set the user up for success.**

Make a list of words you can target during the routine. Keep this list handy and use the “search” features to find the words on the user's device if you need to.
- ✓ **Find motivating activities!**

Assess what the individual enjoys doing most often throughout the day.

Examples of Activities

  - Listening to music
  - Playing with toys/games
  - Going to the playground
  - Cooking/making a meal
- ✓ **Make sure to include social interactions.**

Find opportunities where the individual can communicate with a peer or adult at least once a day.
- ✓ **Keep AAC available.**

The individual won't be able to actively communicate if their device is tucked away or turned off. Make sure the device is accessible during all daily activities to provide increased communication opportunities.

## References:

Akinyele, D. (2023). Practical Tips and Strategies for Embedding AAC into Daily Routines (Webinar) <https://www.ablenetinc.com/practical-tips-and-strategies-for-embedding-aacinto-daily-routines-on-demand-registration/> O'Neill, T. (2018). Perspectives of parents of children with cerebral palsy on the supports, challenges, and realities of integrating AAC into Everyday Life (dissertation). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, Ann Arbor. Zangari, C. (2019). Encourage Students to Use AAC by Supporting Communication Partners. The ASHA Leader, 24(4), 36–37. <https://doi.org/10.1044/leader.scm.24042019.36>

# Modeling AAC Daily Routine

Encourage communication development at home by modeling words, phrases, and sentences throughout daily activities on your child's speech device. Here are some examples of ways to model using activities you complete each day. Try to do at least one thing from each category every day and record what words you worked on in the spaces provided!

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>Wake Up</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings and emotions</li> <li>• Plans for the day</li> </ul>							
<b>Get Ready</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today's outfit</li> <li>• Brushing hair/teeth</li> <li>• Making the bed</li> </ul>							
<b>Play Time</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pictures in books or on TV</li> <li>• Toys and associated words (i.e toy cars: go/stop, fast/slow, etc)</li> </ul>							
<b>Outside Time</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Things you see: Trees, animals, people, buildings, the weather, etc.</li> </ul>							
<b>Meal Time</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colors of food</li> <li>• Modeling "more" for specific foods</li> </ul>							

# Daily Device Checklist

AM

PM



Device is charged.



Device is turned off.



Device turned on and working.



Device is charging.



Communication app is open and ready to be used.



Device is clean and ready for the next day.

**\*\*Be sure to backup your speech app weekly!**

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# Communicating During Times of Challenging Behaviors

## QuickTalker Freestyle (QTF) 101

- ✓ First and foremost, make sure the QTF is charged and accessible for your child to use to communicate!
- ✓ Remember that your child is not an expert with using the QTF yet! They are relying on you to teach them how to communicate, especially during their times of challenge.
- ✓ Ensure all preferred (e.g., toys, favorite places, etc.) and necessary vocabulary is programmed on their QTF in order to self-advocate and reduce frustration.

## Put Your Detective Hat On!

- ✓ Try to determine where the behavior is stemming from. Is it due to refusing to do something, lack of access to a preferred object, etc.? Acknowledge it!
- ✓ Interpret how they are feeling (e.g., sad, frustrated) and model how they can communicate that functionally on the QTF.

## Show Them How!

- ✓ Model how to functionally request a break, ask for help, or terminate an activity on the QTF in order to reduce outbursts (e.g., “I need a break”, “give me space”, “I need help”, “I don’t like that”, “all done”.)
- ✓ Turn the negative into a positive! Model during positive behaviors too (e.g., “Thank you for showing me how you feel!”, “I like how you asked for help!”, “I like the way you are playing!”)
- ✓ Communicate with your child’s SLP, and behavior specialist, if applicable, about other suggestions specific to your child’s needs.



**Contact our ableCARE team for assistance with editing and customizing their device to reduce frustration and allow access to essential vocabulary:**

**Email:** [ablecare@ablenetinc.com](mailto:ablecare@ablenetinc.com)

**Phone:** 651-294-3101



**Contact our AbleNet Medical Data Support Team for questions about data collection:**

**Email:** [fundingservices@ablenet.com](mailto:fundingservices@ablenet.com)

**Phone:** 651-401-1269

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# Setting Up Your Space for AAC Success



Whether you're in the home, the clinic, or the classroom, thoughtfully setting up your environment can encourage communication and support successful AAC use. The following strategies help create a space that fosters AAC use during daily interactions.

## Device Management

- ✓ **Always have the AAC device available.** The device should accompany the user throughout the day for maximum communication opportunities.
- ✓ **Establish a designated home for the device.** Create a consistent charging/storage station where the device stays overnight, making it easy to find each morning and ensuring it's fully charged.
- ✓ **Position the device for optimal access.** Place it within easy reach based on the individual's specific access method.

## Environmental Setup

- ✓ **Control lighting thoughtfully.** Adjust lighting to prevent glare on the device screen while also reducing overstimulation.
- ✓ **Minimize visual clutter.** A calmer visual environment helps users focus on communication rather than competing stimuli.
- ✓ **Create space for movement.** AAC should be engaging and dynamic! Allow room for users to move and interact naturally while communicating.

## Strategic Item Placement

- ✓ **Create communication opportunities.** Keep highly motivating toys, snacks, or activities on shelves or out of direct reach to encourage requesting.
- ✓ **Use containers strategically.** Store items in clear boxes or containers that require help to open, providing natural opportunities for the user to ask for assistance.
- ✓ **Add visual supports throughout the environment.** Place pictures or icons on relevant items and locations for quick communication modeling. For example, put a "go" icon on the door or an "eat" icon on the refrigerator so you can model communication in the moment, even if the device isn't immediately available.



## Keep It Fresh

Rotate toys and materials regularly. Swap out toys and change their locations periodically to maintain novelty and sustained interest.

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