



Why use AAC?

By the time you attend for your child's first AAC assessment, it is likely you, and your child may already have developed lots of great ways to communicate. You may have strategies that are fast and work well at home. Sometimes families feel they don't need AAC as they understand everything their child says or communicates. However, AAC is not intended to replace the excellent personalised communication systems many families have developed. Instead, it should support existing communication and add new opportunities.

The family and child's personalised communication system is recognised and valued.

Many successful adult AAC users continue to use their personalised systems, developed when they were young, to effectively to communicate every day. They may use informal methods with their families and personal assistants to communicate quickly and effectively. These methods often assist communication in places where AAC is not so good (such as in the swimming pool). This personalised system can be more discrete when talking about private matters in public. However, AAC can provide people of all ages with a way to communicate on the phone, to make friends when out socially and to communicate more formally. For example, telling a doctor what their symptoms are when unwell, or by contributing to presentations at school.

AAC can complement personalised systems and open up new opportunities

Personalised systems often rely on shared knowledge and experience, the routines of everyday life and skills that have been developed between communication partners. Children who use AAC may have really good skills getting their messages across with family and those who know them well, and when talking about things that happen regularly. However, they may find it challenging to communicate with less familiar people, to talk about things outside the immediate context or to use the phone. The introduction of AAC is aimed to complement personalised communication systems and provide children with the opportunity to communicate with people who don't know them so well and to

communicate less obvious messages. During the I-ASC study, participants shared their ‘Little Eureka Moments.’ These were moments when a child used AAC to communicate in a new way or showed skills others did not realise they had. These moments showed the value AAC can have for children.



Teaching staff

I remember Barry's mother being very happy about it and being in a café and he asked for a hot chocolate and a cookie or something which was pretty mind-blowing really for him. I think the bit that got Barry's mother, what she was so excited about was, it was that spur of the moment. They just went off and did it, it wasn't a structured activity, it wasn't - does Barry like this or is it in the book or is it on the aid, it was a case of, well, we're going to the café as a family, and what do you fancy for lunch? There's the menu, and they read him out the things and then he found it on the aid and ordered what he wanted, and it was lovely, by the sound of things, it was really lovely.

SLT

She's done lots of things. Mum's given me examples in the past which I now kind of can't remember but we've both been absolutely stunned at what she can do.

Parent

He did get admitted to hospital Friday and we took it to hospital with us and he did tell the paediatrician that he wanted...he felt bad and that he wanted to go home. So that was good. That's the first time he sort of used it outside of school for things like that which was nice to see.

AT Professional

She told her she had a headache and she wanted a tablet... she had a pain, which was a very big first for mum because she'd never told her that she had a pain in her head before. So there were those little eureka moments that we talk about that were really lovely.

Parent

I think it was his dad's birthday and she [his mum] had sat with him and worked out what he wanted to write in the birthday card for his dad, so he'd chosen some animals, that was fine and then she said what do you want to say to daddy? And he said, "I feel love, Daddy." And then daddy bad or daddy naughty or something like that (chuckles), so she just wrote it out and of course daddy cried I think when he got that card but I think for him to be able to have said all of that and then seen it being written out was just really good.

Parent

She was in there with the whole the family, and she threw a complete two-year-old tantrum. So she was taken out into the kitchen, had the aid on. She told her dad she didn't want to watch that on the telly through the aid. But she still continued having this big, big stop. So we gave her 20 minutes to calm down and then we said, "Hello Anne-marie, how do you feel now?" "I feel sorry." And we didn't know up until then that she had any empathy, that she felt those feelings, nobody knew because we didn't know that she had any remorse, whether she was just playing up because she was playing up or whether it was a disability-linked issue.

Parent

Little eureka moments

The fact that she can now get her feelings across is the biggest thing. I mean we had such a huge breakthrough.

Parent

Why using AAC at home is important.

As AAC is often used to support communication with less familiar people and about less common topics, some people may think that AAC is best to use in school and not at home. However, learning how to communicate with AAC takes time and practice. Having opportunities to use AAC with those who know the child best can help develop AAC skills. Finding ways to use AAC at home (to create stories, discuss TV or play games) can help children to build skills they can then try out with extended family, friends, and teachers.