

## What is AAC?

AAC stands for Alternative and Augmentative Communication. AAC is anything that we use to communicate that is not oral speech. AAC can be *aided* (it makes use of one or more things to support communication) or it can be *unaided* (the person uses only their body to convey their message). In our schools we regularly see use of sign, pics (i.e. Boardmaker picture symbols), and a variety of technology (often a dedicated iPad with a communication app).

## Who Uses AAC, Why, and For How Long?

Many people do not have oral speech that meets their daily communication needs. The use of speech generating devices (“talkers” or communication devices) is an important part of their daily interactions and learning. Talkers are used *in addition* to whatever oral speech, gestures, sign or other methods the person uses. The goal is never to replace oral speech; the goal is functional communication that allows for social interactions, self-representation and learning.

Children with significant speech sound disorders, children who are pre-verbal, non-verbal or minimally verbal, and children for whom the acquisition of language is challenging can all make use of AAC. It can be short- or long-term. It can be as a supplement to other communication methods, or it can be the primary or sole method. In addition to meeting their daily communication needs and increasing language complexity, using AAC effectively has been shown to contribute to the development of oral speech skills.

## How Do Skills Develop

Communication encompasses a broad set of skills that children acquire across their day and throughout the years. Adding the component of technology complicates the process of supporting communication skills, but the principles of learning to communicate are the same. Learning comes from exposure and opportunities and encouragement. AAC learners need people around them who are positive about the talker and use it themselves to model simple language throughout the day. There needs to be commitment to authentic, autonomous, meaningful engagement and communication via whatever means works.