

**Augmentative Alternate Communication (AAC) The What, Why and How**

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What is communication?

- Generally accepted as the sharing of information, thoughts, ideas opinions etc. through the exchange of symbols
- Two parts to communication
  - Receptive communication
  - Expressive communication

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**What is AAC?**

- Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) includes all forms of communication (other than oral speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas. We all use AAC when we make facial expressions or gestures, use symbols or pictures, or write.

Stephen Hawking

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### What is AAC?

- Augmentative communication can be defined as ANYTHING used to enhance and increase both receptive and expressive communication
  - Gestures
  - Pictures
  - Symbols
  - Electronic devices

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### Why use AAC?

- People with severe speech or language problems rely on AAC to supplement existing speech or replace speech that is not functional.
- AAC users should not stop using speech if they are able to do so. The AAC aids and devices are used to enhance their communication.
- People with difficulty understanding spoken language (ASD, deafness, memory deficits etc.) use AAC to understand messages presented by others

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### Low tech Expressive AAC

- Universally understood gestures
  - Head shaking and nod for yes and no
  - Thumbs up
  - Eye blinks or directional movements
  - Basic sign language
    - Teach to meet basic needs first
      - IE thirst and hunger
      - Bathroom

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Low tech Expressive AAC

- Picture Exchange Communication (PECS)
  - Pictures can range from photos to stick figure drawings
  - Photos are the easiest to establish shared meaning
  - The more abstract the more difficult to assign shared meaning
- First establish that picture exchange or selection has meaning and power
- ❖ Then establish shared meaning of a picture

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Low tech Expressive AAC:  
Pictures Continued

- Once shared meaning for a symbol or picture is established the patient can start choosing from multiple pictures or symbols
- Start with choice of 3 items and gradually build up as more pictures are learned
- Depending on the patient may need to limit number of choices presented at once

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Low tech Expressive AAC:  
Pictures Continued

- Typically address wants and needs first
  - Noun based and activity based
    - Food choices
    - Clothing choices
    - items or activities

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Low tech Expressive AAC:  
Pictures Continued

- Example of choice board:



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LOW tech Expressive AAC:  
Pictures Continued

- If establishing a PECS book with an SLP:
  - Track most desired items or activities
  - Observe teaching techniques used by SLP
  - Implement use of communication system consistently
  - ASK QUESTIONS
- Resources:
  - Boardmaker
  - <http://www.pogoboards.com>

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Low tech Expressive AAC: Letter Boards



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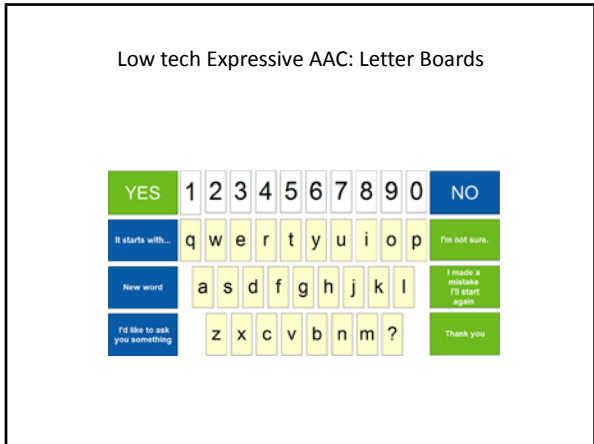
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Low tech Expressive AAC: Letter Boards

- Letter boards should be customized to the individual
  - Add specific frequently used questions or statements
  - Add frequently used grapheme combinations
    - TH, CH, SH, TION etc.
- Both letter boards and picture boards can be printed on

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High tech Expressive AAC

- Should be established with an SLP in conjunction with care providers
- May range from a single message speech output device to electronic devices that convert picture board or letter board messages to speech output
- Established functional low-tech communication is a baseline for establishing high tech communication

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Resources for High Tech expressive communication

- Idaho Assistive Technology Project (IATP)
  - [www.idaho.at4all.com](http://www.idaho.at4all.com)
  - Lending library located on the third floor:
    - 322 E. Front Street  
Boise, ID 83702
    - Open Monday and Tuesday 9-5
    - 208-364-4561

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Resources for High Tech expressive communication

- School based assessments:
  - [www.idahoat.org](http://www.idahoat.org)
- Adult assessments:
  - May be provided through vocational rehabilitation

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Low Tech Receptive AAC

- Object communication
- Object should be directly tied to up coming activity
- Consistently use the same object before the same activity
- Examples:
  - Wash cloth handed to individual before bath time
  - Hand bowl, utensil napkin etc. before meal time
  - Toy bus or van before outing

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### Low Tech Receptive AAC

- Picture communication
- To train:
  - Show picture that represents activity or item at the same you are doing activity or getting item
  - Use shaping to slowly increase latency between when picture is shown and item is needed or activity is starting

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### Low Tech Receptive AAC

- Visual Schedules
  - Can address the entire day, part of the day, or sequences required for one specific activity or task
- Examples:

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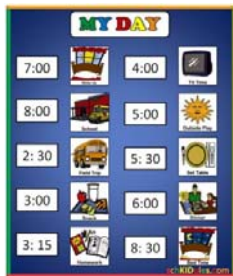
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### Low Tech Receptive AAC

- Full day schedule :



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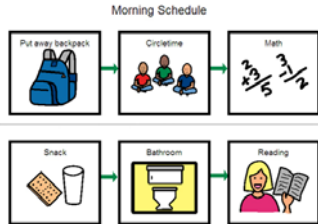
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### Low Tech Receptive AAC

- Partial day visual schedule




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### Low Tech Receptive AAC

- Task Sequencing:
- When creating task based visual sequence boards go through the task your self first and include ALL steps




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### Low Tech Receptive AAC

- Choice boards
  - Used to direct close-ended decisions
  - Used to initiate communication
- Expressive Vs.




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### Low Tech Receptive AAC

- Considerations for establishing visual schedules and task sequence boards
  - What is the purpose of the board?
    - To teach a task or communicate events, activities etc.?
  - What is the individuals level of initiation for task completion?
    - More self initiation means less detailed schedule

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### Considerations when selecting AAC

- What is the patient's mobility?
  - Fine motor and gross motor abilities
- Baseline established communication
  - How is the individual currently communicating wants and needs?
- Age

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### Considerations when selecting AAC

- Cognitive ability and education level
- Disability
  - Is it progressive, congenital?
- Where are communication deficits most readily apparent?
  - Where will AAC need to be used?

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Tips for working with and SLP

- Track most reoccurring communication needs
  - To make requests
    - What are the most requested items?
  - To follow directions
  - To perform tasks
- Track accuracy using system or device on a daily basis
  - For example 4/5 tries, 50%, needed modeling etc.

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Tips for working with and SLP

- Be consistent with using established AAC
  - The more consistently AAC is used the more likely it is to be independently incorporated into an individual's communication
- Report progress
- ASK QUESTIONS

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