

# Interacting With an AAC User

People communicate in many ways other than talking. Some non-speaking or minimally speaking people use Augmentative and Alternative (AAC) devices to express themselves. These devices can be anything from high-tech iPads to picture cards. It is important to understand that AAC is a person's voice. Here are some important things to remember when having a conversation with an AAC user:

## 1. Give time and avoid interruptions

Pausing and providing wait time goes a long way. It takes time to build messages with an AAC device. Avoid finishing people's sentences and let them know that there is no rush. Pause after you talk and don't be afraid of silence. This shows that you value what they have to say.

## 2. Address the AAC user directly and respectfully

Non-speaking does not mean someone doesn't understand! Include AAC users in conversations and avoid talking over them. Speak to AAC users with the same tone of voice and body language that you would with any other student.

## 3. Respect personal space and equipment

AAC devices are an extension of the user's personal space. Respect devices as you would someone's personal belongings. Avoid making changes to their device or forcing them to use the device if they're not comfortable with it. Check with the student before touching their device.

## 4. Ask open-ended questions

Ask open-ended questions to engage in meaningful and thoughtful dialogue. Although asking yes/no questions is fast, they are the most limiting. For example, instead of asking, "Was the field trip fun?" try something like, "What did you like about the field trip?" This gives the person the opportunity to respond openly, rather than a "yes" or "no".

## 5. Acknowledge all forms of communication (facial expressions, gestures, pointing, etc.)

Accepting all ways of communication helps non-speaking students share their ideas and needs, especially since many are still learning how to use their devices. When we value these ways,



students feel understood, included, and less frustrated. Check your understanding of the AAC user's message, and be honest when you don't understand and need clarification.

## 7. Raise awareness with peers

Helping others understand how AAC students communicate ensures that they are included in conversations, learning, and social interactions. It also builds patience, respect, and better support from peers and staff. Chat with your SLP to brainstorm ways to include your non-speaking student in class activities.