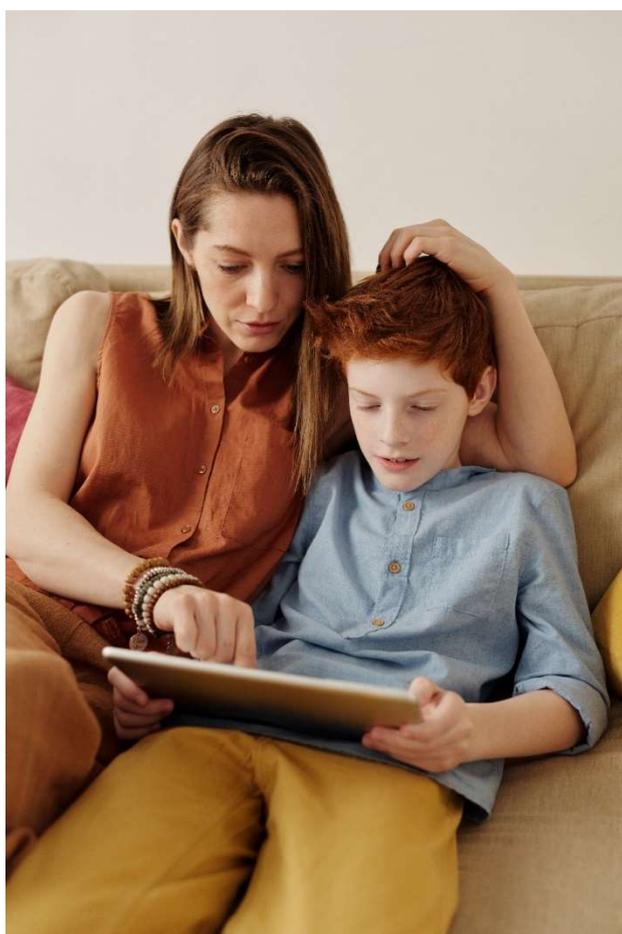


Cornwall Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Assessment
Team
CAACAT



High-Tech AAC Implementation Pack for Parents and Carers

What parents need to know

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What Now?

Your child has been offered a device on loan to trial. It's arrived, has been personalised for them but what now? How do you begin using it?

Below, and further on in this this pack, there are a range of tips and tricks to ensure your child has the best start at using high-tech AAC.

First things first, you and your child need to know how to turn it on and off. You also need to agree a place in the house to charge it up every night. Keep the charger somewhere safe. Find the app/software that you are trialling and open it up.

- ✓ **Commit to using the device.** Even if your child is using the device to support their speech, they need time and opportunities to learn to use the device.
- ✓ **Begin to think about the device being your child's voice.** It should be with them all the time and it's use encouraged.
- ✓ **Allow your child to explore and just press buttons.** Press the buttons together, listen to the sound. This is a part of exploring the device and what it does.
- ✓ **Play games with the device.** Have a race to see who can find 'fish' first. Or who can find what folder 'friend' is in. There are some suggestions for games at the back of this pack that you can use.
- ✓ **Make mistakes.** Make mistakes when creating messages on the device. Laugh about it and then correct the mistake.
- ✓ **Get everyone using the device.** Parents, siblings, grandparents, friends...get them all involved in creating messages with your child by pressing buttons and exploring where words are located.
- ✓ **Focus on finding and using core words in messages.** Core words are words used all the time such as 'I, and, like, go'. There is more information about core words later on in this pack.
- ✓ **Use a total communication approach.** This means using and accepting all methods of communication such as signing, pointing to things etc. The AAC device is just another tool in the box for your child to use. If it is quicker for them to sign toilet, then accept the sign for toilet. Make sure they know where the button for 'toilet' is on the device though, so they know they can use the device to ask for toilet if they are with someone who does not understand their signing.

Core and Fringe Vocabulary

When young people are learning to communicate in alternative or augmentative ways it is often easier as adults to encourage AAC users to just use the fringe words on their device. As many adults find out soon enough though, this restricts what can be expressed and limits conversations that can be had with the communication partner.

Core Words	Fringe Words
Small number of words that make up 80% of what you say	Large number of words only used around 20% of what you say
Useful across all environments, settings and situations	Useful across limited situations, environments or settings
High frequency of use- used all the time!	Low frequency of use- used some of the time
Expands communicative opportunities	Restricts communicative opportunities
Made up from different parts of speech such as verbs, descriptors, pronouns	Made up from nouns and proper nouns
Symbol or word locations on the device are consistent, core words can be found in the same place	Symbol or word locations on the device are inconsistent, words are hard to find and many pages need to be searched to find the right word
Examples: I, go, you, want, need, buy, it, say, help	Examples: Coffee, tennis, TV, chair, label, car

Core Words

Core words are the words we want to model most! To find out about modelling see the modelling section in this pack.

There are many different lists of the top core words used depending on the age of the person and their location in the world. Here we have given you a starting list of core words. Your technical officer can give you more at a later stage.

Tick them off as you go, but don't introduce all the core words at once!

Pronouns

I	It	You	He	She	me
---	----	-----	----	-----	----

Question words

What	Where	Who	when
------	-------	-----	------

Verbs, describing words, quantity words, prepositions

Want	Go	Like	Stop	Help
Get	Look	Put	Make	Need
Open	Do	Is	Can	Have
See	Come	Eat	Drink	Turn
Don't	Not	Finished	Different	Good
More	Some	All	On	In
Up	Here	This	That	

Modelling

Modelling is essential when learning to use a high-tech AAC device. Our young people cannot be expected to just know where things are on their device. Think of when you get a new mobile phone; it takes you a little while to get used to it and you make mistakes along the way. It's the same with a new AAC device.

Modelling is also great for helping our young people expand their communication. If for example, your young person is stuck using one-word phrases, such as 'cartoon', modelling will help them expand to say 'want cartoon' or 'like cartoon'.

We need to model one step above what the young person can say, so if they can manage 'like cartoon', model 'I like cartoon' or 'you like cartoon', or 'Mollie like cartoon'.

How to model- an example

Your child comes to you and says 'banana'. You could just give them a banana, but you will not be extending their communication.

Try modelling on the device by pressing the buttons 'want banana' and give them the banana. They might want to try pressing 'want banana' for themselves.

When you've mastered this you can model 'I want banana please' over time.

Tips on modelling

- Only model key words that help you understand what they want to say, don't bother modelling little words like 'is, a, the' at first.
- Don't worry about Grammar, instead of modelling 'a banana' model 'want banana' as it gives more context to the sentence.

We have a further guide on modelling on our webpage www.cornwall.gov.uk/AAC.

Steps to Success

Below are our top tips to getting success with the high-tech device right from the word go.

- **Take the device everywhere** – we mean everywhere! Grandparent’s house, the supermarket, the beach, school, clubs etc. The only place it should not go is at the side of the swimming pool, or in the bath! But, it still should be nearby.
- **Agree a place to charge the device** - get your young person, if they are safe to do so, to put the device on charge each night in an agreed location. Make it part of your bedtime routine. Bath, pyjamas on, brush teeth, plug in device, bedtime!
- **Use the strap** – There will likely be a strap on the case of the device, unless you requested not to have this. Use it, encourage your young person to wear their device when out in the community. This does two things; allows the young person to realise it’s for them to use and they need to look after it, and also empowers them to always have their voice to hand whenever they might need it.
- **Use the search function** – Have you spent a while looking for a word with no luck? We have been there! Thankfully all software now come with a search function (if it didn’t, we wouldn’t ask you to trial it!). Use this with your child and search for the word together. The search function will show you where to find it so you can both learn where it is located for future use.
- **Learn how to turn up and down the volume** - this is for both you and your child. There’s nothing more embarrassing than when your child asks to go to the toilet and it is projected loudly across the classroom. Naturally, we all change the volume of our voices in different situations, your child needs to learn how to do this too on their device. Lower the volume when talking close by, raise the volume when talking in a loud place or the person is far away.
- **Don’t be afraid to make mistakes** - learning something new takes time, for both you and your child. You will find your child will learn to use it quicker than you will! If you make a mistake when modelling, that’s great! If you say the wrong word, say *oops* and correct it. Your child will be watching, they may find it funny, they may be able to help you find the word. It’s all a good learning experience.

Getting Others Involved

Your child/young person will need experience in talking with their device with a range of people. We want our young people using high-tech AAC to become confident communicators so we need to provide opportunities to chat with a range of people. Below is a tick list to see who they are communicating with, and some ideas you could use to increase the people they use their device with.

I can use my device with:

My parents/carers	My grandparents
My siblings	My aunts, uncles and cousins
My teachers and the school staff	My friends at school
My friends in the community (e.g. friends at football)	My parents/carer's friends
My neighbours	People in my community (e.g. shopkeeper, bus driver)

- When a grandparent or other person asks you what your child has said, help your child to repeat what they said using their device.
- When an adult asks you as a parent to ask your child something, encourage the adult to ask your child directly then help your child to answer.
- When your child wants you to ask another person something on their behalf, encourage your child to ask them themselves and help your child to do this.
- Prompt your child to talk about something that happened with someone else.... 'Why don't you tell Granny what funny thing happened today...'
- Make sure everyone your child is contact with on a regular basis knows they have a device to use, and ask them to encourage your child to use it too.
- Encourage your child to show their grandparents, aunts and uncles and other people how to use the device. They could use it together with your child being the expert in using the device!

Myths

Below are some things we are asked often which are in fact myths. You may be worrying about some of these yourself.

Myth:

A high-tech AAC device will fix all communication difficulties.

An AAC device will not fix all communication difficulties. It can help support the young person to work on some of their difficulties but will not fix everything.

Myth:

A high-tech AAC will stop my child's speech development.

Research and evidence tells us that, in fact, an AAC device helps to support the development of speech. We have supported children that started off with a device, and then no longer needed it as their speech developed so much. Equally we have supported children where their speech has developed but they still need the support of an AAC device for regular or occasional use.

Myth:

I can understand everything my child says at home so we don't need to use the device at home.

We hear this a lot from parents, and although at a younger age you may as a parent understand everything, as they get older and their comprehension and vocabulary develops you may well not understand everything. You may also think you know everything your child wants to say but what if it's out of context. Would you be able to understand if your child is talking about what's for tea (at home) whilst at a café? We need your child to be competent in using their device, even with you, so it is worth spending your time working on using the device with them, so there are no communication breakdowns at a later stage.

Games

Below are some good games to play when using a device and what to model when playing them.

I spy/I see - This is a great game to play when using high-tech AAC. You can replace the word 'spy' with 'see', using 'I see F'. Then encourage your child to find words beginning with F. You can leave the page up when the word is to help, as they get used to the categories, they can find the words in the folders themselves.

Bubbles - If your child is at an age that enjoys bubbles they can be very motivating to use as a game. Use the words 'go, stop, more, fast, slow, again, finished, my turn, your turn.'

Silly sentences - Take turns making up crazy sentences, or get your child to finish your sentence off with a silly word. It increases the ability to find all kinds of words in categories and models longer sentences for your child. E.g.

Parent: I went to the shop and saw achild: tiger

Parent: he was wearing....child: pink shoes.

Playing with toys such as Lego – your child could use the device to request the size or colour of the piece, or direct you as an adult of what piece to add next.

Scavenger Hunt / Nature Walks – your child could find something blue, big, an animal etc. Write a list of the things you're going to find, on the device, or ask your child verbally 'what have you found?'. They can then use their device to respond or you can model 'we found leaf' on the device, for example.

Stories – read stories together and model with the device some of your sentences or sentences from the book. You may have a book with a repeated phrase, encourage your child to help say the phrase by selecting words on the device.

AAC Training

To support you with your high-tech AAC journey we will be inviting you to attend a course called 'AAC Steps'. The course is for parents/carers and school staff that are supporting children new to high-tech AAC. In the course we cover the basics of how you can make high-tech AAC work and why we recommend certain approaches. It will also allow you time to network with other parents that are in a similar position as you with their own child.

The AAC Steps course outlines the steps to success for your high-tech AAC journey. Ask your AAC Technical Officer for further information.

Once the trial period is complete or near to completion, your AAC Technical Officer will provide training to you and the school in programming the software for long term use. This is essential training as you will be required long-term to add on new vocabulary to the device.

AAC Team Newsletter

Our AAC Team newsletter is a monthly email full of ideas, tips, core word ideas, video links and handy printable documents. Sometimes, it is themed about events happening that month. We've had great feedback on our newsletters. If you haven't already been added to our newsletter mailing list, you can either ask your Technical Officer to add your email or contact us at AACSupport@cornwall.gov.uk.

Useful Links

Please see our webpage links to videos and handouts. www.cornwall.gov.uk/AAC under the resources section.