

*Page 1 (cover) – trim to 4 inches each  
this page has 2 covers to make 2 flipbooks*

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# **AAC Device ✓**

## **Now what?!?**

TIPS FOR REACHING AAC SUCCESS

[www.vlindertherapies.com](http://www.vlindertherapies.com)

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Be kind and patient with yourself.

Push buttons!

Explore!

Learn!

Practice!

Have fun!

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~ Lisa Hancock  
(parent of Max, AAC communicator)

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# BE KIND TO YOURSELF!

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Literally. That means **WHEREVER** you see the AAC communicator, you should also see his/her AAC system.

The AAC device should be within arm's reach at all times. And charged. And powered on.

You can't communicate if you don't have access to communication.

**It is NEVER okay to turn off or take away a communication system!**

(Other behavior management strategies are needed.)

**SEE ME, SEE MY AAC**

*"The average 18-month-old has been exposed to 4,380 hours of oral language at a rate of 8 hours/day from birth.*

*A child who has a communication system (AAC) and receives speech/language therapy 2 times/week for 20-30 min. will reach the same amount of language exposure (in their AAC language) in 84 years."*

~Jane Korsten

*"If you use my talker, I will learn how to use my talker."*

~Kate Ahern

The BEST way to learn a language is to be immersed in it. Learning to speak AAC is no different.

Point to/touch symbols on the AAC system at the same time as you are speaking. This normalizes AAC as a valid way of communicating and at the same time teaches the AAC user "how it's done."

Initially, your goal is to say 1 or 2 words via the AAC system while you verbalize your complete statement. As you get more comfortable, follow the **+1 Rule**.

# Speak AAC to Teach AAC

*Based on Prompt Hierarchy from Kate Ahern*

1. **CREATE MOTIVATION:** Set up highly engaging conditions that increase the AAC learner’s desire to communicate.
2. **EXPECTANT PAUSE:** Be attentive and wait. Provide 10-20 seconds “wait time” to give the AAC user an opportunity to communicate.
3. **Indirect Visual Cue:** Use gestures/body language to indicate to the AAC user that something is expected (e.g. facial expression, push device closer, questioning hand motion with shoulder shrug, etc.); then wait expectantly.
4. **Direct Visual Cue:** Point to or show the symbol, hover your finger over, tap your finger to get the AAC user started with his/her message, then wait expectantly.
5. **Indirect Verbal Cue:** Give a hint, use an open-ended question that indicates something is expected (e.g. “Do you have something to tell me?” “You can tell me what you want.”) or give the first part to get them started (e.g. “Can I...”), and wait expectantly.
6. **Direct Verbal Cue:** Using “non-directive” language, tell them possible messages they might want to say (e.g. “You could say \_\_\_\_.” “I wonder if you think \_\_\_\_.”), then wait expectantly.
7. **Direct Model:** If still no response, model on the AAC system the expected response or what you think the AAC user might want to say. Then pause and wait expectantly.
  - Increase motivation and re-expose to target vocabulary

Start with #1 and provide least amount of support possible for success.

# PROMPTING HIERARCHY

- **Aided Language Input (Modeling)** – Speak AAC to Teach AAC; immerse them in their AAC language
  - **+1 Rule:** Model one more word than the AAC user is typically using (e.g. if the AAC user typically uses 1-word utterances, model 2-word phrases on the device while verbally saying the full statement)
- **Descriptive Teaching:** use available vocabulary to describe/provide clues when the specific word isn't available or known (e.g. "big, outside, red stuff out top" for volcano)
- **Core Words / Key Words:** focus on core words (verbs, pronouns, descriptive words that make up 80% of our overall daily communication) and key words to get the intended message across
- **Language Expansion & Extension:** respond by repeating what the AAC user said with additional words to add "completeness" and/or "content" to their message (e.g. GO CAR → "Yes, going in the car." Or "go blue car.")
- **Teach Meaning by Attaching Meaning:** we teach intentional communication by treating all of the AAC user's communication attempts as meaningful (we give it meaning and respond accordingly)
- **Communicative Functions:** model language for a variety of purposes (commenting, directing, describing, opinions, rejection, questions, relating information, AND MORE)

# TEACHING STRATEGIES

- ✗ **Don't** expect the user to know how to communicate simply because he/she now has an AAC system. You must first teach and model – A LOT – before you can expect any expressive communication.
- ✓ **DO presume competence!** The AAC user can learn.
- ✗ **Don't** underestimate the AAC learner. This leads to frustration and a lack of motivation (and potentially challenging behaviors).
- ✓ **DO set high expectations** – and then provide support, quality instruction, motivation, and focus on PROGRESS (not perfection).

Perception drives expectation.  
Expectation drives opportunity.  
Opportunity drives achievement.  
Achievement drives perception.  
~PrAACTical AAC

- ✓ **DO respond to the intent** of their message, not the grammar, “correctness”, or way they communicated it. Accept multi-modal communication.
- ✓ **DO keep their device programming current.** If they don't have the words to say what they want to say, they will not be motivated to communicate.
- ✗ **Don't** ask the AAC user questions to prove their ability or tell them what to say. Communication is not a test; it's about connecting.
- ✓ **DO ask open-ended questions** (e.g. “what do you want to drink?” instead of “do you want milk?”)
- ✓ **DO use non-directive language.** Encourage and teach functional, genuine communication (spontaneous, novel utterances is our goal). Engage, converse, connect!
- ✓ **DO HAVE FUN!**

Motivate!  
Model!  
Move out of  
the way!  
~ Kate Ahern

# DOs & DON'Ts

- If you understand the AAC user's message, accept it and respond accordingly
- Would it pass the "Stranger Test"? If you have to do ANY interpreting or guessing to figure out what he/she means/wants, encourage them to 'tell more/help you' using their AAC system
- If the AAC user initiates any communication via their AAC system, praise & immediately respond as appropriate (if possible, honor the request to reinforce them for doing it)
- If they are struggling to communicate their message via their AAC system (and you have a guess at what they are intending to say), provide guidance as needed to help them say it
- If the AAC user does not attempt to use his/her AAC system, but you think you know what they mean/want (e.g. via behavior), model how to say it; for example, "I think you are telling me... → *model via AAC*"
- If you are not sure what he/she is trying to say, ask them to give you clues to help you
- Model, Model, Model; create an immersive environment
- Model all day, every day; across environments, activities, and people
- Allow the AAC learner time to explore & "babble" with their device
- Create opportunities & motivations for the AAC learner to communicate, but *never* force communication (communication is a choice)
- Find your support network. Building new communication habits is hard work! Having a support network to encourage and walk with you through this process can make all the difference.
- Celebrate the little successes along the way – because they are BIG! Communication is messy and hard and a journey of many little steps.

# TIPS & SUPPORT STRATEGIES