



Augmentative and Alternative Communication



Some neurodivergent people may speak minimally, experience situational mutism or be non-speaking. This doesn't mean they cannot understand language or communicate in other ways.

A lot of communication occurs without speaking, including through body language, movement, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, noises and touch.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) refers to communication devices, systems, strategies and tools that replace or support spoken language. AAC can be unaided (like gestures or facial expressions) or aided (like picture boards or speech-generating devices).

To communicate with and support minimally and non-speaking students, you can use visual aids or communication boards, and collaborate with families and specialists to learn about students' unique communication needs and styles.

Access to communication tools is essential for students to access meaningful education, engage in social connections and have agency. AAC devices and strategies should not be treated as optional because all students have the right to communicate in a format that is accessible to them.

When all students are given the opportunity to learn how to communicate through AAC, this encourages peer-to-peer communication and acceptance.

Examples of AAC

- **Low technology:** Visual schedules, books, pictures, communication boards, choice boards, objects, and writing.
- **High technology:** Tablets, computers, smart phones, apps for speech intervention, messaging apps, text-to-speech, speech-generative devices and devices that respond by eye gaze or breath.

Benefits of AAC

- Facilitates communication
- Promotes independence
- Fosters autonomy and agency
- Enhances social interaction and strengthens relationships
- Aids students in accessing help, and supports safety
- Improves quality of life
- Reduces frustration