

## **Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)**

Some people with communication support needs use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

### **What is AAC?**

AAC is the term used to describe methods of communication which can be used to add to the more usual methods of speech and writing when these are impaired. It can be used instead of, or as well as, speech. AAC can be a way to help someone understand, as well as a means of expression.

AAC includes:

- unaided systems which do not require any specific equipment, for example signing and gesture
- aided techniques ranging from picture charts to sophisticated computer technology.

It is important to recognise that the system a person uses is their 'voice'. Listen to what they tell you as if it was spoken.

### **Your role**

The person may be able to use the AAC system independently, and may just need you to listen.

However, some people need the listener to take a more active role in the communication. See Communication Matters 'Focus on...' leaflets for further information (<http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk/page/focus-on-download>).

### **Practical action to assist AAC users to participate**

It can take an AAC user a very long time to compose a message. Some people using a talking device like to speak the message out a word at a time as it is composed. Others prefer to wait until the message is completed.

In a meeting, make sure the chairperson is aware which way the individual prefers, and that the person gets a chance to be heard when they are ready. It can take some listeners a while to tune in to synthesised speech output. It may help them to understand, if you repeat what the person using AAC has said. That will also give the AAC user a chance to correct you if you did not understand it correctly.

If the AAC user is composing a message, but time is tight, acknowledge that they will want to be heard, but suggest that the meeting continue meanwhile, and stop when they are ready to give the message.

Some AAC users will be happy for you to guess the end of their sentences, to save time and effort. Others will find this intrusive or patronising, and prefer to say everything themselves.

This document is based on information provided by CALL Scotland and Communication Matters