

# AAC Basics for Parents

## Understanding Augmentative & Alternative Communication

AAC stands for Augmentative and Alternative Communication. It includes any tool, strategy, or system that helps a person communicate when speech alone is not enough. AAC does not replace speech — research consistently shows it supports and often increases spoken language development.

### Types of AAC

Type	Description & Examples
<b>No-Tech AAC</b>	Gestures, sign language, facial expressions, pointing, body language. Every child already uses some form of no-tech AAC.
<b>Low-Tech AAC</b>	Picture cards, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), communication boards, visual choice boards. Printed, no batteries required.
<b>Mid-Tech AAC</b>	Simple voice-output devices (like a BIGmack button) that play pre-recorded messages when pressed.
<b>High-Tech AAC</b>	Tablet-based apps with dynamic displays. Examples: Proloquo2Go, TouchChat, LAMP Words for Life, TD Snap. Allow access to thousands of words.

### Common Myths About AAC

Myth	Reality
<b>“AAC will prevent my child from talking”</b>	Research shows the opposite. AAC reduces frustration and gives children a reason to communicate, which often leads to more speech, not less.
<b>“My child needs to fail at speech first”</b>	There are no prerequisites for AAC. A child does not need to “prove” they can’t speak before getting access to communication tools.
<b>“AAC is only for non-speaking children”</b>	Many children who speak some words benefit from AAC to express more complex ideas, make choices, or communicate when overwhelmed.
<b>“My child is too young for AAC”</b>	Children can begin using AAC as early as 12–18 months. Early access to communication tools supports all areas of development.

**“My child isn’t smart enough for AAC”**

AAC is not about intelligence. It’s about access to communication. Every child deserves a way to express themselves.

## Getting Started with AAC

- **Talk to your child’s speech-language pathologist (SLP)** about AAC options. If your SLP dismisses AAC, seek a second opinion from one who specializes in it.
- **Start modeling.** Use the AAC system yourself while talking to your child. Point to pictures on the board as you say the words. This is called “aided language input” and it’s the most effective way to teach AAC.
- **Start with motivating words.** Don’t begin with “yes” and “no.” Start with words your child is motivated to use: favorite foods, toys, activities, people.
- **Make it available everywhere.** The AAC system should go wherever your child goes — meals, car rides, playground, bath time. Communication doesn’t happen only during therapy.
- **Be patient.** It takes time for a child to learn a new communication system. Most children need months of consistent modeling before they begin using AAC independently.

## Free & Low-Cost AAC Resources

Resource	Details
<b>ASL (American Sign Language)</b>	Free to learn via YouTube, apps like The ASL App, or Lifeprint.com. No equipment needed.
<b>ARASAAC</b>	Free picture symbol library (arasaac.org). Thousands of icons for communication boards.
<b>Cboard</b>	Free, open-source AAC web app (cboard.io). Works on any device with a browser.
<b>AssistiveWare Core Word Classroom</b>	Free resources for teaching core vocabulary with AAC (learn.assistiveware.com).
<b>Proloquo2Go / TouchChat</b>	Paid apps (\$250–\$300) but may be covered by insurance, school, or state assistive technology programs. Ask your SLP.

### Remember

*Communication is a human right. Every child deserves a way to express their needs, thoughts, and feelings — whether through speech, signs, pictures, or a device. AAC gives your child a voice. It is never too early and never too late to start.*