

Augmentative Communication

What is Augmentative Communication?

Augmentative Communication (AC) is a way for a child to communicate when the child does not have the physical ability to use speech or writing. AC can be high-tech, such as a computer that is programmed to talk for the child. AC can also be low-tech by using simple pictures, sign language, or a device that plays recorded messages. Speech-language pathologists may help the child to use a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). Children can use AC for a short time while speech skills are developing, or for their entire life.

Who should use AC?

AC can help people who cannot talk at all. It can also help children who can talk but are hard to understand. A speech-language pathologist will help decide if AC is appropriate for a child. If the child can benefit from an AC system, the speech-language pathologist will recommend the appropriate type of AC system. The speech-language pathologist will also train the child and family members on how to use it effectively.

What are the benefits of using AC

AC can help the child to improve his or her ability to interact with others and communicate at home, in school, and in the community. It can help the child to participate in school and become more independent. Using AC can also decrease inappropriate behaviors, such as tantrums, crying and whining, that are often due to the child's difficulty with communication.

Will AC prevent the child from speaking?

Many parents are concerned that using an AC system will prevent their child from developing speech. Although not all children will develop speech after using an AC system, AC does NOT interfere with the development of oral speech skills. In fact, AC can actually help with the development of oral speech.

Current research states that AC stimulates the development of oral speech by giving the child more opportunities to participate in communication and hear the correct production of sounds. AC also helps the development of language because it often combines a picture with a word. This helps the child understand what the word means. Finally, AC takes the pressure of speaking off children who have trouble with the physical demands of speech production.

Children know that speech is a faster and better form of communication. Therefore, the child will begin to use speech instead of AC when he or she develops the required oral-motor skills for speech.

What can parents do to help?

The purpose of AC is to teach the child another way to communicate. Just as adults provide models of speech that help their children learn to talk, parents also need to provide models when the child is learning to use AC. Parents may be asked to use the pictures, communication book, or speaking device themselves to help the child learn.

Parents may also need to learn sign language or to learn how to program a high-tech communication device. As with learning any new skill, frequent practice between therapy sessions is important so the child is able to use AC in everyday communication. The parents and SLP may identify specific times for the family to work with the child at home.

Websites for Augmentative Communication:

- United States Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication: <http://www.ussaac.org>
- International Society for Augmentative/Alternative Communication: <http://www.isaac-online.org/>
- The RERC on ACC: <https://rerc-aac.psu.edu/>
- AAC Funding Resource Link: <http://www.aacfundinghelp.com/index.html>
- DynaVox Systems manufacturing home page: <http://www.dynavoxtech.com/>
- Prentke Romich Co., Inc.: <http://www.prentrom.com>
- Assistive Technology Inc.: <http://www.assistivetech.com>
- Closing the Gap: <http://www.closingthegap.com>
- Augmentative Communication News: <http://www.augcominc.com>
- Yaack: Augmentative and Alternative Communication Connecting Young Kids: <http://aac.unl.edu/yaack/>
- Hamilton County Educational Service Center – Assistive Technology Consortium: <http://www.hcesc.org/assistive-technology-consortium>

For more information, please contact the Division of Speech Pathology at (513) 636-4341 or visit our website at www.cincinnatichildrens.org/speech.