Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) refers to other methods of communication people may use when they have difficulty speaking. These methods may supplement what speech they do use or may become the primary form of communication in the absence of speech.

There are many different types of AAC. There are unaided methods which do not require any additional items or equipment such as facial expressions, gestures and signing. Aided methods include picture symbol communication charts and books, and special electronic devices.

Some people find communication difficult because they have little or no clear speech. There are many reasons why this might be the case – such as a result of Cerebral Palsy, Down’s Syndrome, or Autism.

We all use other methods to supplement our speech – such as using gestures and facial expressions to get our message across more clearly. However, people with complex communication needs may rely on them all the time.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF AAC**

The primary aim of AAC is providing a means of functional, effective communication. Therefore, AAC can:

1. Provide the opportunity for the child to reach his highest level of language ability - both understanding others and getting his message across.
2. Assist in developing cognitive, social and academic abilities through the increased use of effective communication.
3. Reduce the risk of behaviour problems which result from frustrations due to not being understood by others.
4. Increase quality of life through a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction that their messages are being understood by others.
5. Increase participation in daily activities (at school, work, play) and in society.

“Everyone has the need to communicate. The challenge is to figure out a way of providing all individuals with appropriate ways to meet this need, regardless of their age, diagnoses, or level of disability.”

(Sigafoos & O’Reilly, 2004, p.1229)

**KEY POINTS**

- Everyone has the right and the need to communicate.
- AAC helps people communicate by providing a range of alternatives or supplements to speech.
- AAC can help prevent the negative impacts of ineffective communication on other areas of development and quality of life.
References