

AAC Does Not Hinder Natural Speech Development

Won't AAC stop my child from developing natural speech?

We know from an analysis of the research that using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) does not stop natural speech development. In fact, there is some early evidence that it may actually support natural speech development (Millar, Light & Schlosser, 2006; Blischak, Lombardino & Dyson, 2003).

Shouldn't AAC be introduced only after giving up hope of natural speech?

It is difficult to predict the future development of speech in a young child. Children with complex communication needs who receive therapy for speech only, can endure years without an effective means of communication and underdeveloped language skills. A child who is unable to communicate effectively is at risk for cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural problems (Romski, 2005). This might already be evident in your child's frustration or isolation at school.

“AAC intervention has significant benefits in the development of communicative competence and language skills; the present best evidence analysis provides data that suggest AAC interventions can also have positive benefits for natural speech production.”

(Millar et al, 2006, pg. 258)



Shouldn't speech, even if it is very limited, always be the primary means of communication?

Most children who have some speech will naturally use it as a primary means of communication (Romski, 2005). That is because speech is a very efficient, unaided method to get across a message. When we introduce AAC we look at providing a total communication system which includes a range of different communication methods, including speech if possible, which allows the child to communicate with a range of different people, in different environments at different times.



KEY POINTS

- If your child is going to continue to develop speech this will occur naturally even if they are using AAC.
- AAC should be introduced as soon as it is identified that speech is inadequate to meet your child's needs.
- Children will always use speech, if they can, as it is the most efficient and accessible method.
- Children need a range of methods to be able to communicate with all people in all situations.

But I have no problems understanding my child.

Think about all the other people that your child encounters in his daily life now and in the future. As discussed above, it is great if speech can be a component of your child's communication system and used with family. But AAC may be necessary for your child to participate in lessons at school, socialise with friends, participate in the community (such as going to scouts, ordering a take-away meal) and work towards independence in adulthood (for tertiary education, employment, living alone).



References

- Blischak, D.M., Lombardino, L.J., & Dyson, A. T. (2003). Use of speech-generating devices: In support of natural speech. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 19* (1), 29-35.
- Millar, D.C., Light, J.C., & Schlosser, R.W. (2006). The impact of augmentative and alternative communication intervention on the speech production of individuals with developmental disabilities: A research review. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research, 49* (2), 248-264.
- Romski, M. (2005). Augmentative communication and early intervention: Myths and realities. *Infants and Young Children, 18* (3), 174-185.

FIND OUT MORE

AAC and natural speech development...

<http://aac.unl.edu/yaack/b2.html>

<http://aacworkshop.pbworks.com/f/Myths---AAC-and-Speech-01-11-10.pdf>

<http://www.cathybinger.com/links/research/publications/2008/>

This handout is part of an information package, funded by a NGCS grant, to assist local teams in supporting children who require augmentative and alternative communication - particularly communication devices. Augmentative and alternative communication, or 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.

This handout may be reproduced for teaching purposes/use with clients.
© Rocky Bay 2010 **Positive AACtion Information Kit for AAC Teams**