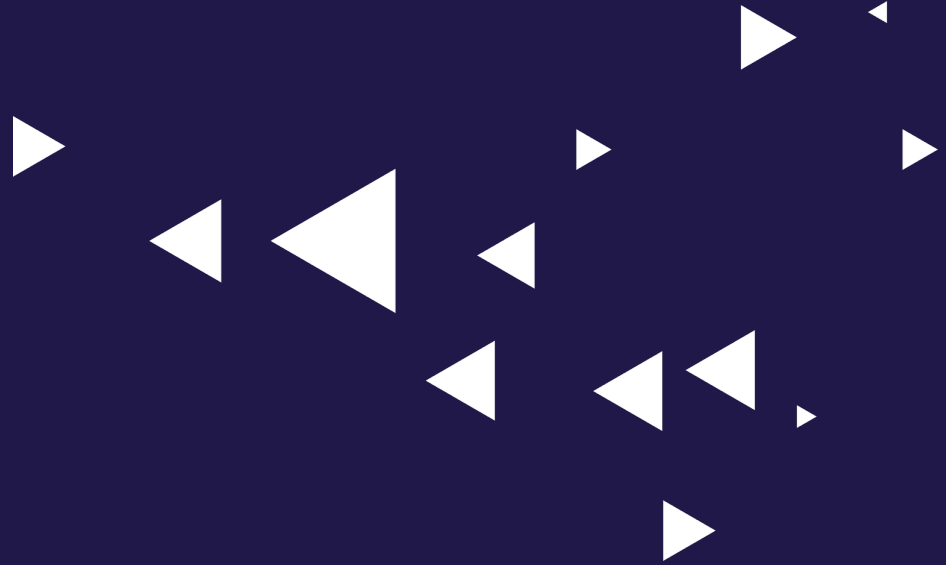# Intro to Augmentative & Alternative Communication & Resources

Caitlin Hurban, M.A., CCC-SLP
AAC AT Specialist
Michigan Assistive Technology Program
Michigan Disability Rights Coalition

Michigan Alliance for Families
information, support, and education

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Intro to Augmentative & Alternative Communication & Resources

Questions & Housekeeping

Please feel free to ask questions during the presentation.

There will be pauses throughout for questions as well.

If you have child specific questions, please send me your email address in the chat along with your questions or email me directly so I can give your question my full time and attention.

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Welcome & Presenter Introduction

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Agenda

- About MATP
- What is Assistive Technology (AT)?
- Introduction to AAC
  - Terminology
  - Types of AAC
  - Access Methods
  - Getting Started
  - Ongoing Support
- AAC Resources
  - Organizations
  - Companies
  - Training
  - Picture Books
  - Social Media
  - Funding

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Michigan Assistive Technology Program (MATP)

- MATP is a **FREE** federally funded program that provides AT related supports around the state including:
  - Awareness Information
  - Training
  - Demonstrations
    - Customized virtual or in-person "how to" sessions to explore AT that meets your needs
  - Loan Program
    - MATP has over 1700 AT items for demo and/or loan
    - *Try before you buy!*
- MATP is by people with disabilities for people with disabilities, their allies, and other community members.
- MATP serves the entire lifespan.

What is AT?

- Assistive Technology (AT) is any item, piece of equipment, software, or app that is used to help people with disabilities, including older adults, do what they want to do.

- Technology can make things easier for everyone. For people with disabilities, AT opens up possibilities.

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AAC Modalities

AAC is commonly used to refer to AAC communication systems, and folks often think of speech generating devices in particular, but it also includes:

- gestures
- facial expressions
- body language
- body movement
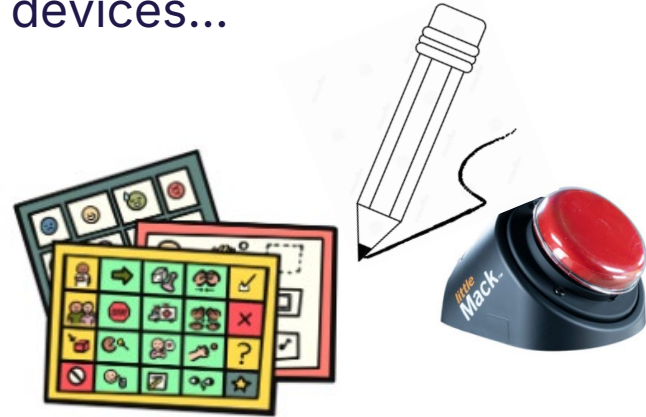- drawing
- spelling
- writing
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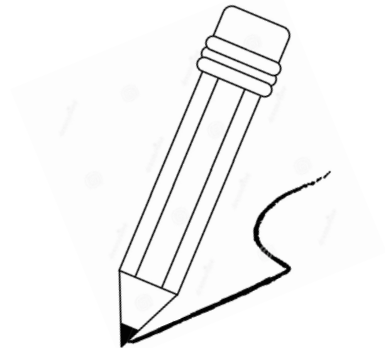
Types of AAC

Unaided: no external items needed, only the body

  Examples: facial expressions, gestures, body movement...

Aided: uses a tool outside of the body

  Examples: printed boards, pencils, single message switches, speech generating devices...

What is AAC?

Augmentative: communication that supplements or adds to speech

Alternative: communication that takes the place of speech

Communication: the active process of exchanging ideas between two or more people

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC): all of the ways, methods, or modalities of communication except for speech

Types of AAC

Lite tech/no-tech/non-electronic: AAC that uses no electricity. Often made of paper or plastic.

   Examples: writing, drawing, printed symbol icons, printed symbol boards, printed picture/symbol books, 3D printed/tactile symbols

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Types of AAC

Mid-tech: AAC that typically uses a battery and generates speech, usually a static display and/or limited symbols/language

  Examples: single message switches, sequential switches, static display overlay speech generating devices

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Types of AAC

High tech: AAC that typically uses a computer based system with a rechargeable battery. The display often dynamic, meaning that there can be several layers/pages to navigate to access all the language available, provides speech generation

  Examples: dedicated speech generating devices, tablets with communication apps

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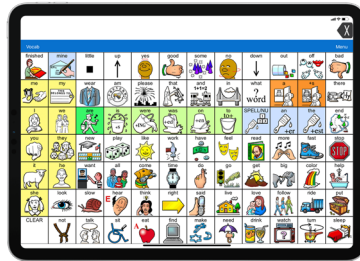
Access Methods

Selection: the way a message is produced by the AAC user within the communication system.

Direct selection: the AAC user chooses the word/symbol from an array of words/symbols.

  Examples: electronic, non electronic, physical touch with body or another object (e.g., finger tip, knuckle, palm, chin, nose, stylus, generated movement or signal (e.g., eye gaze, mouse, joystick, light)

Indirect selection: aka scanning: each word/symbol from a selected page is presented in order until the AAC user chooses the word/symbol via an indicating motion, vocalization, or switch.

    Words/symbols may be presented in a number of ways/orders, depending on the needs of the individual. Words/symbols may be presented auditorily, tactilely, or visually and may be assisted by a communication partner.

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Who uses AAC?

We **ALL** use some form of AAC at one point or another.

There are many reasons why someone may benefit from adding AAC as a communication modality. Including:

- They are non speaking
- They are part time speaking
- They have motor planning needs that make speech difficult
- They have a disability that impacts language development
- They are recovering from a medical intervention (e.g., intubation, surgery)
- They have an acquired brain injury
- They have a neurodegenerative disease
- They have a fluctuating disability that may change over time
- And more!

-Some people are full time AAC users and some are part time AAC users.

-AAC needs can shift during the course of day and/or over a lifetime.

Source: ASHA.org, Canva

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Who can use AAC?

Everyone.

There are NO prerequisites or foundational skills required to start learning to use an AAC system.

Why use AAC?

Access.

Social connection.

Autonomy.

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Communication Bill of Rights: Everyone has the right to express their wants, needs, thoughts, and ideas.

All people with a disability of any extent or severity have a basic right to affect, through communication, the conditions of their existence. Beyond this general right, a number of specific communication rights should be ensured in all daily interactions and interventions involving persons who have severe disabilities.

To participate fully in communication interactions, each person has these fundamental communication rights:

The right to **interact socially**, maintain social closeness, and build relationships
The right to **request** desired objects, actions, events, and people
The right to **refuse or reject** undesired objects, actions, events, or choices
The right to express personal **preferences and feelings**
The right to **make choices** from meaningful alternatives
The right to make comments and **share opinions**
The right to **ask for and give information**, including information about changes in routine and environment
The right to **be informed** about people and events in one's life
The right to access **interventions and supports** that improve communication
The right to **have communication acts acknowledged and responded to** even when the desired outcome cannot be realized
The right to have **access to functioning AAC** (augmentative and alternative communication) **and other AT** (assistive technology) services and devices at all times
The right to **access** environmental contexts, interactions, and opportunities that promote **participation as full communication partners with other people, including peers**
The right to be **treated with dignity** and addressed with **respect and courtesy**
The right to be **addressed directly** and not be spoken for or talked about in the third person while present
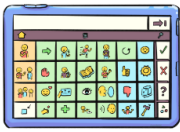The right to have **clear, meaningful, and culturally and linguistically appropriate** communications

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How to get started with AAC?

A speech language therapist leads an evaluation that will likely assess/include a review of the individual's:
- Case history (e.g., education, medical status/history, occupation,)
- Access needs: vision, hearing, motor, sensory
- Current communication skills and needs, communicative competences, language processing
- Language and communication preferences, symbol needs and preferences
- Long term communication goals

An AAC evaluation can be completed a number of ways. The following are helpful tools/approaches to consider: SETT Framework, Participation Model, Access Learning Process (ALP) for AAC, Pragmatic Profile, Communication Matrix, ethnographic interviewing, interviewing support team, Feature Matching

An AAC evaluation must include a trial of AAC systems. The length of the trial may depending on the setting and any funding requirements (e.g., insurance).

AAC evaluations can occur: in private therapy, in the school setting, in a medical setting.

AAC evaluations are often interdisciplinary and may also include: family members, occupational therapists, physical therapists, teachers, psychologists, social workers, paraprofessionals, and other medical or educational professionals.

There are many AAC systems available. How do you choose? It comes down to feature matching.

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Considerations of AAC Selection

High tech AAC is most likely to be provide a robust communication system that:
- has a large quantity and variety of well organized words that include: core and fringe vocabulary
- offers grammar supports
  - goal: reflective of the individual's dialect and language **work to do here
- is customizable to the voice output that best reflects the individual's:
  - age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, dialect, language, and cultural identity
- has customizable symbols to reflect the individual's race and personally relevant vocabulary
- allows for future growth
- supports the individual in communicating for a variety of reasons to express their wants, needs, thoughts, and ideas
  - Including, but not limited to: requesting, questioning, expressing self advocacy, protesting, asking for help, describing an emergency, sharing health status, telling jokes/sharing humor, etc.
- can be available at all times.

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Always have backup!

Back up AAC is best planned out ahead of time and may change depending on location and needs over time.

It is always helpful to have lite and mid tech back up AAC systems.

- Screens can need repair
- Batteries need charging
- Systems need updating
- beaches/pools can be wet, sandy, and hot
- Sporting events may need lighter weight options
- Certain environments can have sanitary concerns (e.g., bathroom, food prep areas)

How to support someone learning to use AAC?

- Create a language rich environment by providing modeling
  - (aka: aided language input/natural aided language, aided language stimulation)
  - NOT the same as modeling for imitation, but rather, modeling for the sake of example

- **Communication is an invitation, not a demand.**

- Acknowledge all communication by the person and make meaning, regardless of modality or perceived "mishit."

- Remember that all communication has value. No modality is superior to another. The goal is communication.

- Allow for processing time.

- Be aware of and honor the person's alerting method.

- **Treat the AAC system like a voice. Don't take it away. And always have a backup.**

Source: ASHA.org

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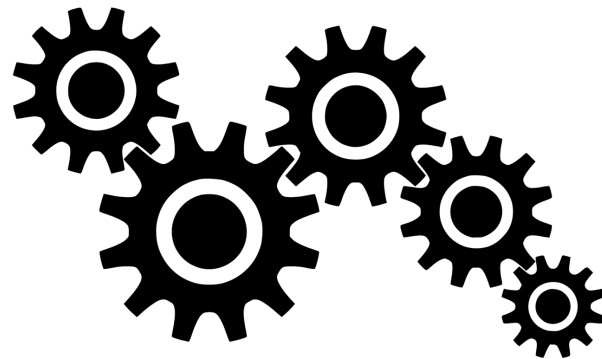
Questions? Wonderings?

Michigan Organizations/Resources

- Alt + Shift
  - Lending library for PK-12 public schools, print PODD books, custom keyguards, training
  - altshift.education/lending-library

- Disability Rights Michigan
  - advocacy (drafting letters, appeals, etc.), including school AT
  - www.drmich.org

- Great Lakes Loan Closets
  - Search loan closets by area, make donations of items
  - https://loanclosets.org/

- Michigan Alliance for Families
  - Regional parent mentors, birth to 26, training, resources
  - https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org/

- Michigan Department of Education "Supports for Students with Disabilities" page
  - https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/special-education/supports

- The Michigan Council for Exceptional Children

This is not an exhaustive list and an organization status may change at any time.

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Organizations

- **American Speech Language Hearing Association**
  - https://www.asha.org/
- **International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication**
  - https://isaac-online.org/english/what-is-aac/
- **United States Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication**
  - https://ussaac.org/
- **Northwest Augmentative Communication Society**
  - https://nwacs.info/
- **The AAC Institute**
  - https://aacinstitute.org/
- **National Aphasia Association**
  - https://aphasia.org/
- **Apraxia Kids**
  - https://www.apraxia-kids.org/

Many of these websites have free downloads, resource guides, links to research, and training.

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AAC and Mounting Companies (in no particular order)

- **Tobii Dynavox**
  - https://us.tobiidynavox.com/
- **PRC-Saltillo**
  - https://www.prentrom.com/
- **AssistiveWare**
  - https://assistiveware.com/
- **Attainment Company**
  - https://www.attainmentcompany.com/
- **AbleNet Inc.**
  - https://www.ablenetinc.com/
- **Forbes AAC**
  - https://www.forbesaac.com/
- **CoughDrop**
  - https://www.coughdrop.com/
- **Smartbox**
  - https://thinksmartbox.com/

- **Talk to Me Technologies**
  - https://www.talktometechnologies.com/
- **Lingraphica**
  - https://lingraphica.com/
- **Modular Hose**
  - https://www.modularhose.com/
- **Mount'N Mover**
  - https://www.mountnmover.com/
- **RJ Cooper & Associates**
  - https://store.rjcooper.com/
- **Enabling Devices**
  - https://enablingdevices.com/

Many of these websites have free downloads, resource guides, links to research, and training.

This is not an exhaustive list and availability may change at any time.

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AAC Training and Support

- AAC in the Cloud Conference
- Talking AAC Conference (November 6-8, in East Lansing)
- Learn. Play. Thrive.
- The AAC Coach
  - https://www.theaaccoach.com/authentic-aac
- PrAACtical AAC
  - https://praacticalaac.org/praactical/aac-online-learning-5-free-courses-to-explore/
- AAC Language Lab
  - https://aaclanguagelab.com/
- Most major AAC companies
  - PRC-Saltillo AAC Learning Journey
  - Tobii Dynavox Learning Hub
- SpeechPathology.com
- Groups for educators
  - MI Schools in AACtion
  - MI POHI/SXI

This is not an exhaustive list and availability may change at any time.

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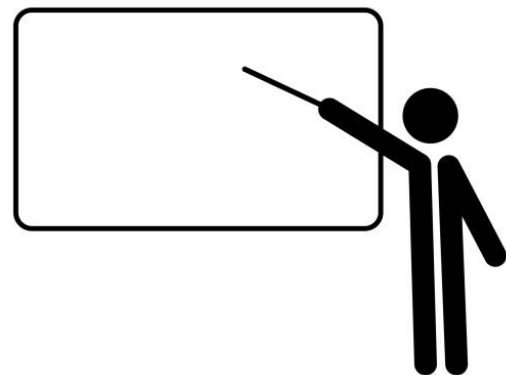
Additional AAC and AT Resources

- Guidance from the US Department of Education regarding individuals who need AT devices/services at school and how it relates to Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requirements
  - https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/at-guidance/

- Article from Disability Scoop that summarizes the above updates
  - https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2024/01/25/ed-department-warns-schools-not-to-overlook-assistive-technology-in-ieps/30714/?fbclid=IwAR14RpB69iEvAis2uIlNIXWCTwlDevlVWJZUvYokifc_n7UKjQJSm4eQ3YU

- Open Access 2.0 AAC Resources
  - https://www.openaccess-ca.org/open-access-aac-resources

- The Communication Development Center (gestalt language processing)
  - https://communicationdevelopmentcenter.com/the-natural-language-acquisition-guide-echolalia-is-all-about-gestalt-language-development/

- American Speech Language Hearing Association Evidence Map for AAC with Systematic Review
  - https://apps.asha.org/EvidenceMaps/Maps/LandingPage/990772a6-9cd8-4203-a76c-6ccd91eac874
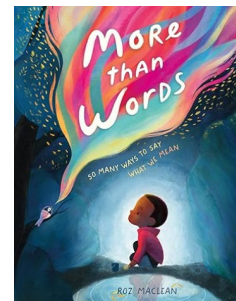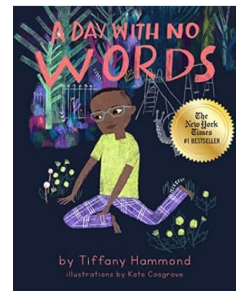
Picture Books

- A Day With No Words Hardcover
  - by Tiffany Hammond (Author), Kate Cosgrove (Illustrator)
- More than Words: So Many Ways to Say What We Mean
  - by Roz MacLean (Author, Illustrator)
- AAC Rhyme Time
- I Talk in Different Ways
  - by Amanda C Hartmann (Author), Nanhee Ha (Illustrator)
- Included: A book for ALL children about inclusion, diversity, disability, equality and empathy
  - by Jayneen Sanders (Author), Camila Carrossine (Illustrator)

There are many blogs/lists of books available and new books published all the time.

Follow MaiStoryBookLibrary for more excellent picture book recommendations based on specific needs and experiences.

MORE than WORDS
SO MANY WAYS TO SAY WHAT WE MEAN
ROZ MACLEAN

A DAY WITH NO WORDS
The New York Times #1 BESTSELLER
by Tiffany Hammond
illustrations by Kate Cosgrove

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Social Media & Podcasts *MDRC/MATP does not endorse any particular group or content creator.*

To follow: (in no particular order)
- The AAC Coach
- Learn Play Thrive
- OMazing Kids
- Golden Oak Speech Therapy, Karina Saechao
- Rachael Langley, AAC Specialist
- Emily Diaz
- Jane Farrall Consulting
- Amanda Hartmann - SLP & AAC
- The Occuplaytional Therapist
- AAC Experience
- Building AAC
- Fidgets and Fries
- Speech Room News, Jenna Rayburn Kirk
- Carly Findlay OAM
- Lived Experience Educator
- Nigh.functioning.Autism
- Expand Your Library

Groups to Join, some for parents or professionals:
- Ask Me, I'm an AAC user! (24 Hour Rule)
- Local parent support groups like: Special Families' Corner
- AAC for the SLP
- Neurodiversity-Affirming SLPs
- Learn Play & Thrive: Autism Resources for Professionals

Podcasts:
- Two Sides of the Spectrum
- Talking with Tech AAC Podcast
- The Neurodiversity Podcast

This is not an exhaustive list and pages/creators may stop or change course at any time.

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Resources for Learning About Assistive Technology

- AT3 Center's
  - ExploreAT.net

- JAN (Job Accommodation Network)
  - https://askjan.org/

- Unified Listing, "AT Search Engine"
  - ul.gpii.net

- Assistive Technology Industry Association
  - https://www.atia.org/

This is not an exhaustive list and new resources become available regularly.

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Resources for AT and/or AAC Funding

- Michigan United Cerebral Palsy (MI-UCP) Michigan Assistive Technology Loan Funds, Bellows Fund, Mini Loan Fund

- Waiver programs, many regional programs

- Grant programs, local/state/regional

- Insurance, including Medicaid

- Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS), if employment related

- Public Schools and Early On programs, for ages birth-26

This is not an exhaustive list and new resources become available regularly.

Questions? Wonderings?

Want to take a deeper dive into supporting AAC users?

Join Carolyn Parker for
Supporting Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) @ Home
on April 22 from 12:00pm - 1:00pm

Register at https://tinyurl.com/39msvks5

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We are here to support you!

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@michiganallianceforfamilies

/MichiganAlliance

For more information visit
www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org

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En Español 313-217-1060
248-963-0607 للغه العربيه
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Michigan Alliance for Families

Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education (MDE-OSE); the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP); and Michigan's Federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs(OSEP).

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MICHIGAN Department of Education

MiLEAP Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential

early on MICHIGAN

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