

## PASSFIELD PARK SCHOOL

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## Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) - Starting Out

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## Communication

For learning to take place communication is necessary. To enable students to understand expectations, instructions and requests (receptive language) and also to enable them to express their own personal needs, wants and feelings (expressive language), some means of functional communication needs to be developed for each student. The ability to communicate also helps to relieve frustration and reduce some challenging and/or inappropriate behaviours.
At school, visual communication, gestures and key word signing are used together to supplement speech. This enables students to use the system that best suits them and also provides them with back up systems.

## Visual Communication

-Visuals include: real objects, parts of objects or remnants (e.g. empty muesli bar wrapper, front of chip packet), photos, pictures, Boardmaker symbols and even words.
-Visuals aid understanding, processing and retention.
-Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have difficulty processing verbal language. They often think in pictures. They also have sensory processing difficulties so it is useful to support hearing with sight and to keep visuals in place even if the child learns to talk.
-Visuals should always be coupled with speech as they are an aid to assist understanding of spoken language, not a substitute.
-Each visual should always be labelled with the words you want used to describe the visual. This way, whoever is working with the child will use exactly the same words each time that visual is used. Some children even learn to recognise the words.
-Visuals need to be accessible. Keep them near where they are likely to be used. Attach some important ones (e.g. toilet, drink, quiet, wait) to a key ring so they can be readily available wherever you go.
-Allow your child time to process and respond.

## Encouraging Communication

-Use child's special interest or preferred objects and activities to motivate him/her to communicate.
-Create situations where communication is required in order for the child to get what he/she desires. Even when you know what your child wants, resist the temptation to give it to them until they have made some attempt to communicate their desire to you. For example, you could put your child's favourite DVD on a shelf where they can see it, but cannot access it. Depending on their level of development and ability, they could communicate their desire simply by looking at the DVD and looking at you, or they might be at a stage where you could place a photo of the DVD within their reach and encourage them to give you the photo in order to communicate their desire.

## Developing Vocabulary

-So as not to overwhelm or confuse your child with too much information at once, start with one or two signs and gradually increase in accordance with your child's understanding and progress.
-Two very useful words to start with are "more" and "finished".
-The "more" symbol and sign can be introduced during activities your child enjoys. Pause the activity while your child is still enjoying the activity and encourage him/her to request "more" before resuming the activity. Sign and say the word "more" and use the visual for "more". Depending on your child's ability, you may need to place your hands over his/her hands to help him/her form the sign or the child may be able to imitate and copy your hand actions to form the sign. For some children using the visual might involve showing them the visual and waiting for eye gaze, others may be able to point to the visual and others may have the ability to pick up the visual and hand it to you. If they can hand the visual to you, they should be encouraged to do so. This can be done by physically placing the visual in the child's hand and physically prompting them to give it to you. If another adult is available they can help the child pick up the symbol and guide the child's hand to give you the visual. You should take the visual and immediately reward the child with more of the activity. This procedure can be used well at eating time. By giving the child only small amounts of food at a time e.g. four sultanas, the child is then required to communicate his/her desire for more, before receiving more.
-Introduce the "finished" symbol and sign when your child has had enough of an activity or it is time for them to end an activity. For example, if it is time for your child to finish playing and have a bath, show him/her the finished visual, sign and say, "finished" and cease the play activity. (You might like to use a timer or forewarn your child that the activity is about to finish.) Once you have told your child the activity is finished, do not get into an argument with your child about why they need to finish the activity nor about extra time. If they protest, simply redirect their attention to the finished symbol and restate, "finished". At first your child might throw tantrums, but will quickly learn what "finished" means, which will make transitioning from one activity to another far easier.

## Choices

-Another way to encourage your child to communicate is to give him/her choices.
-Start with only two visuals to choose from. (Remember, visuals can be real objects, parts of objects or remnants (e.g. empty muesli bar wrapper, front of chip packet), photos, pictures, Boardmaker symbols depending on your child's level of understanding.)
-Place the two choices in front of your child and wait for a response. Depending on the child's ability, the response might be eye gaze, reaching for, pointing to or grasping. If the child is working at the photo or symbol level and can hand you the photo or symbol of the object or activity they prefer then encourage them to do so.
-In the beginning, make all available choices preferred objects or activities, so whichever choice the child makes, they do not get something they do not like. Once your child understands the process you might like to include an object your child is not particularly interested in, in order to determine whether he/she is selecting randomly or whether he/she is making a definite choice.

- Only provide a choice of objects or activities you are happy for your child to have or do. You decide on the things to be chosen from. If you are giving your child a choice of foods and you do not want your child to have chocolate, then do not include chocolate in the choices.
-As your child becomes competent at making a definite choice from two choices, progress to choosing from three choices, then four, etc.
Schedules
-Schedules often aid receptive language by helping children order procedures, understand expectations and carry out routines.
-When making a schedule for a task, the task needs to be broken down into steps. (This is a task analysis.) To assist in identifying each step of a task, it is sometimes helpful to perform the task yourself and think about what you are doing at each step.
-Each step then needs to be represented visually. At school, Boardmaker symbols are often used for these representations, but at home, you can use a digital camera. Once the steps have been identified, have an adult or competent child perform each step of the task. Photograph each step as it is performed. Produce an individual photo of each step. (If you have access to a laminator, laminate each photo.) Now arrange the photos in order on a piece of cardboard, wall or Velcro strip. -As your child performs each step of the task (even if you are physically performing the task with your child), point to the photo representing what is being done at that step. Try to refer to the visuals every time the task is performed. This assists the child in relating the visual representation with the action being performed. -Understanding the connection between actions and objects and the visual representation of these actions and objects and gaining meaning from visual representations is a basic step in beginning to read.
Example: Schedule for washing hands (Remember you can do the same sort of thing using photos)



## Do this $\longrightarrow$ Get this

This can be a useful visual in encouraging a child to perform a non-preferred activity in order to be rewarded with a preferred activity.

## Examples:



## Frequently used symbols and signs.

This booklet contains some Boardmaker symbols and the corresponding signs for vocabulary used frequently at school. The booklet is set out with three symbols and signs per page. Parents and carers are urged to learn three new signs each week, that is, one page, and to practise using these and previously learnt signs. Use the signs in context, for example, when you give your child their school bag, sign and say, "bag", when you give your child a biscuit, sign and say, "biscuit". Your child will progress at an individual rate and will encounter signs as they are used in context at school. Your child might not have the fine motor skills to perform sign language but might learn to understand the signs when used by others. The Boardmaker symbols have also been included. Showing your child the symbol when you are using the real object or performing the activity represented by the symbol could enhance your child's recognition and understanding of these Boardmaker symbols.

If there is a particular sign, that you feel you would use frequently, but is not included in this booklet, a useful web site for looking up signs is:
http://www.sign.com.au. At this site, click on "Create custom phrases" in the menu at the top of the page. A text box will then appear. Type the word you want in the text box and click on "go". A diagram and explanation of the sign will appear on the screen.

Remember we use only key word signing, that is, we do not sign every word in a sentence, only the words that are most important in conveying meaning. For example, for the sentence, "give me your book", we would only sign the words, "give book" or "book". For "go to the toilet", we would only sign "toilet" or "go toilet".

## Contents of AAC Vocab Lists

| Stage 1 | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| bag | ball | assembly |
| biscuit | bike | boy |
| bye | bin | buy |
| chair | book | car |
| drink | bus | cold |
| eat | cake | cook(ing) |
| finish(ed) | chips | dad |
| give | chocolate | day |
| go | computer | doughnut |
| good | cut | draw |
| help | glue | game |
| hello | hat | gate |
| lolly | home | girl |
| more | listen | happy |
| morning | look | hot |
| no | lunch | jumper |
| sit | open | library |
| stand up | play | mum |
| stop | put | music |
| table | puzzle | rubbish |
| toilet | read | run |
| wait | ride | sad |
| come | sandwich | school |
| same | scissors | shop |
|  | sing | walk |
|  | swim | wash |
|  | T.V. | write |
|  | video |  |
|  | work |  |
|  | name |  |

## Contents of AAC Vocab

| Stage 4 | Colours | Animals |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| bath | black | bird |
| bell | blue | cat |
| bowling | brown | chicken |
| brother | green | cow |
| coffee | orange | dog |
| milk | pink | duck |
| night | purple | frog |
| shoe | red | horse |
| shower | white | pig |
| sick | yellow | sheep |
| sister | grey | goat |
| sleep | colour | fish |
| tea |  |  |
| tired |  |  |
| train |  |  |


bag Make a fist with dominant hand, hold at dominant side at about waist height. Move formation up and down slightly, twice.

biscuit Extend dominant thumb.
Move thumb tip in a small circle on the back of relaxed nondominant hand.

bye Natural gesture for waving goodbye.

eat Close dominant fingertips on to ball of thumb. Tap tip of formation on chin, twice.

go Swing dominant hand, slightly cupped, forward in relevant direction. Finish with straight fingers.

good Extend thumb of dominant hand, move formation forward with stress.

hello/hi Move open dominant hand side to side in air at chest height, palm forward.


Iolly Point dominant index fingertip into cheek. Keeping tip on cheek, roll formation forward and back, twice.

more Cup dominant hand and place fingertips on centre chest - move hand forward.

morning Point the fingertips of the open right hand into the left side of the body.

stand up Open hands palms up. Move hands upwards.


wait Bounce open dominant hand, palm down, in front of dominant side, twice.

come Extend dominant crooked index finger and hold hand in front of body. Move hand back in an arc towards centre of chest.

same Extend index fingers of both hands, palms down and tap sides of index fingers together twice.

bin Both hands form whole-handed "Cs". Place formation in front of body and move down with stress.

cake Bounce tips of fingers and
thumb of cupped dominant hand on back of non-dominant hand, twice.


cut Brush extended right hand index fingertip across palm of open left hand.

glue/paste Brush fingertips of right hand off palm of open left hand, then bring open right hand down on to left palm..

hat Tap head with fingertips of open dominant hand twice.

house Open both hands, place tips of index and middle fingers together then move fingertips apart to trace the roof and walls of a house.

look/see Move dominant index finger forward from eye.


read Extend dominant index and middle fingers, fingers spread. Move these fingertips in a wide zig-zag across palm of open nondominant hand towards blade.

scissors Move dominant index and middle fingers, in a cutting action, while moving hand forward.

television = "T" + "V"
"T"- finger spell "T" "V"- finger spell "V"
swim Place open hands in front of body, palms down - move hands in outward circles or arcs as though swimming breast stroke.


video Extend and spread dominant index and middle fingers, fingers pointing up, palm in. Move this formation in small circles in front of open non-dominant hand, fingers pointing up, palm in.

work Hit blade of open dominant hand on base of thumb of open non-dominant hand, thumb closed, twice - non-dominant arm diagonally across body, blade down.

name Place extended dominant index and middle fingers on ball of thumb, place tips of formation on temple and move formation forward, turning palm away from body.

assembly Place both open hands, palms down, fingers spread, at shoulder height. Move hands up and away from body, then down, as they move towards each other. Wriggle fingers as they move.

boy Rub the edge of the extended dominant index finger forwards and backwards across the chin, twice.

buy Extend thumb of fisted dominant hand. Place this formation on fingers of open palm of non-dominant hand. Sweep the dominant hand formation towards the wrist and then away from body.

cook Cup both hands, fingers spread - move formations forward and back, slightly.

doughnut Left hand forms whole-handed "O"right hand index finger extended, other fingertips on ball of thumb - right fingertips draw a circle around left " O " in front of body.

gate Extend index and middle fingers of both hands, fingers apart - place fingertips of both hands together in front of body. Swing right hand formation forward then back to original position.



music Move both extended index fingers, palms down, from side to side in opposite directions as though conducting music..

rubbish Tap backs of relaxed hands together, twice.

run Move fists in alternate forward circles (as when running).


write Form " $O$ " with index finger and thumb of dominant hand. Move along palm of open non-dominant hand as though writing.

bowling Hold dominant hand as for bowling a ball. Make a deep forward swing with right arm.

milk Open and close right and left fists alternately in the action of milking a cow.

shoe Hold cupped dominant hand, palm down, above open non-dominant hand, palm down. Lower dominant hand as nondominant hand moves forward slightly.
Dominant hand fits over non-dominant hand.

shower Bounce dominant hand slightly cupped, above head, twice.

sick Extend index fingers of both hands. Place dominant fingertip on forehead then move to tap twice on edge of non-dominant extended index finger, in front of body.

sister Tap side of crooked dominant hand index finger on bridge of nose, twice.

sleep Open dominant hand, place near corner of eye. Close fingers onto thumb, as though eyes closing. May use both hands.


brown Place fingertips of open dominant hand on chin, thumb under chin. While moving formation forward close fingertips on to thumb.

green Place blade of open dominant hand on wrist of non-dominant arm. Move formation up to elbow.

orange Hold cupped dominant hand at corner of mouth, close to fist, twice.

pink Move tip of extended dominant index finger in a backward arc on cheek to jaw-line.

white Place dominant thumb and index fingertips together, other fingers extended and spread. Place tip of this formation on side of neck and rock formation, twice.

yellow Close dominant index fingertip onto thumbtip, other fingers spread. Place tip of this formation on temple and swivel formation several times.

grey Place fingertips of open dominant hand on cheek. Make a small forward circle on cheek, twice.

colour Close extended dominant index finger on to dominant thumb .Rub tip of this formation along the edge of extended non-dominant index finger, several times.


chicken/hen Extend dominant index finger and thumb. Keeping this formation, place back of dominant hand against chin. Place non-dominant hand, palm up in front of body. Simultaneously move dominant formation down to touch non-dominant palm and close index finger to thumb tip. Bounce twice.

duck Place tips of dominant index, middle finger and thumb together. Place formation in front of chin and open and close formation, twice.

pig Move dominant fist in a small circle in front of nose.

fish Cross open hands at wrists and wriggle fingers of both hands simultaneously.


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