

How do I teach the child to use the AAC device?

Like most adults, young children may not initially understand how AAC devices work. Thus, adults will need to prompt correct use of the device (see [Progressive Time Delay](#) and [System of Least Prompts](#)) and reinforce correct responding (even if it is prompted) so that the child learns that the device allows them to communicate. Here are some tips to get you started:

1. Model, model,



model! In the video above, you'll see that the child is making choices with a high-tech AAC device, and you'll also notice that the teacher is *modeling* use of the device. When a child uses AAC, all relevant adults should also model communication on the AAC device (much the same way that we model verbal language for children learning to talk!) Even after a child becomes proficient on the AAC device, it is appropriate for adults to continue modeling new concepts and vocabulary. Always model at the same complexity as the child communicates, or slightly above. For example, if a child consistently communicates with a single icon (e.g., "cookie"), use models with 1-2 icons ("cookie" or "want cookie").

2. **Respond to *all* AAC communication promptly, appropriately, and consistently.** Whether the child communicates independently or you have prompted the child to communicate, respond to the communication right away by providing the requested item/activity or responding verbally in an appropriate manner. Even if the child requests low-preferred item/activity that you don't think was an intended request, provide the correct consequence, such that the child can learn that certain icons lead promptly to consistent consequences.



3. **When the child engages in requesting behaviors, prompt her to use the AAC device.** If the child uses gestures or body language to indicate that she wants an item or activity, immediately prompt the child to request the item using her AAC device, and then immediately respond to the prompted communication. For example, if the child is reaching toward a toy that is out of reach, you might prompt her to press the “toy” icon on her iPad and give her the toy. Initially, you may need to use more intrusive prompts (e.g., hand-over-hand physical prompting). As the child begins mastering use of the AAC device, you might shift to less intrusive prompts (e.g., model prompts or gestural prompts).

4. **When the child engages in challenging behaviors, wait for the behavior to stop, and then prompt her to use the AAC device.** To prevent the child from learning that problem behavior results in access to desired items or activities, it is important to keep the child safe and wait for the challenging behavior to cease before prompting the child to use the AAC device. Once the child's body has been calm for several seconds, you can prompt the child to request via the AAC device whatever she was trying to access. If possible, when you think a child may want a specific item or activity, you might provide a prompt or reminder to use the device *before* he or she engages in problem behavior.
5. **Make sure that the AAC device is consistently available, within and across**



settings. Initially, this may mean that teachers, parents, and other adults are responsible for ensuring the AAC is always near the child. Eventually, we want to teach the child to advocate for continuous access.

6. **Set up opportunities to teach use of the AAC device, by scheduling daily practice sessions and by embedding opportunities throughout**

the day. Although your team and the child should aim to use the AAC at naturally occurring instances throughout the day, it is also important to intentionally set up opportunities for the child to practice using the device with your assistance. For example, you might set a goal in free play to temporarily remove the target child's toy five times, in order to prompt him or allow him to independently request the toy back. See below how these teachers conduct a daily practice session to teach the child how to use the AAC device, using a [Progressive Time Delay](#) prompting procedure.