

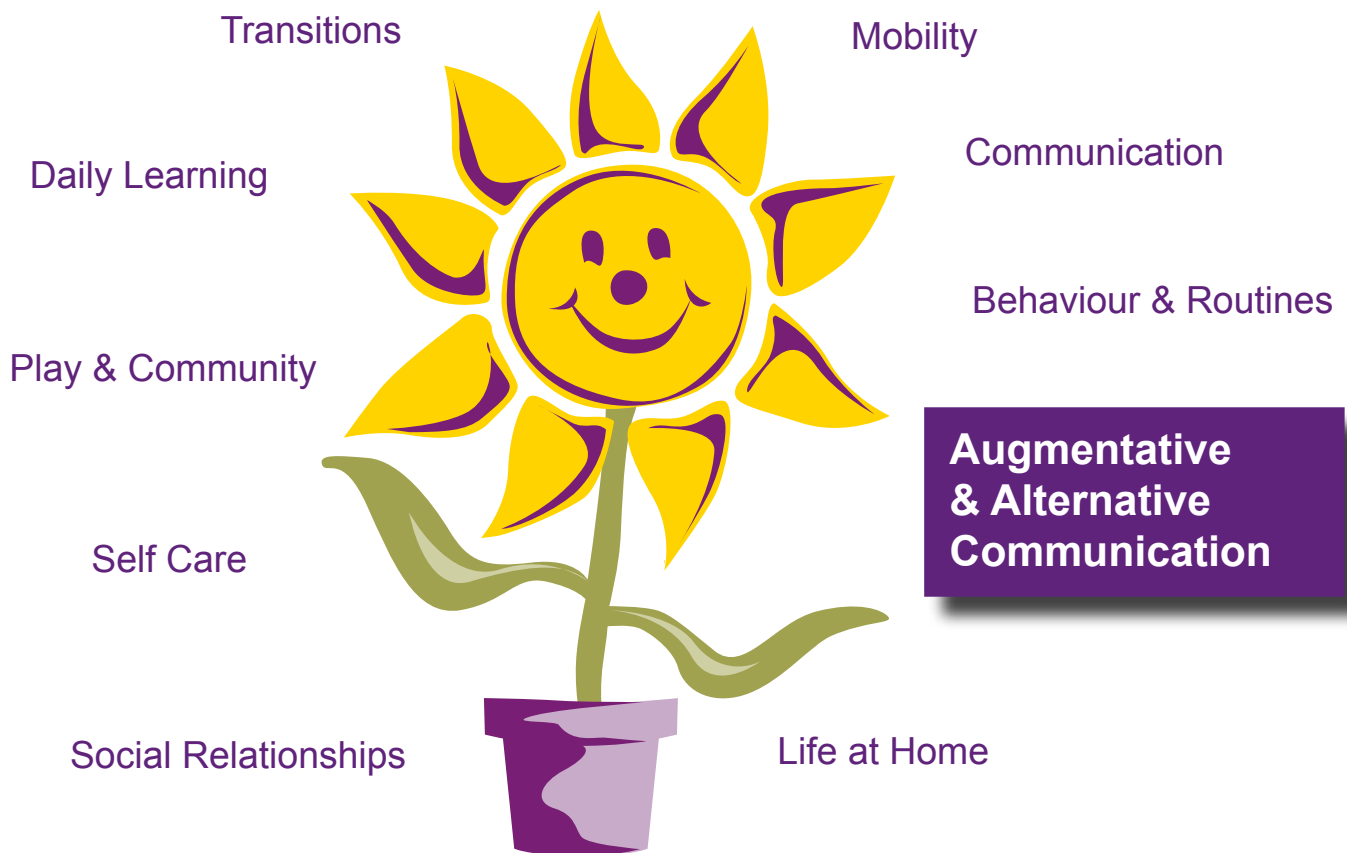
Helping you set goals for your child

At Therapy Focus, we recognise and value your role as parents being the experts on your child and family.

Our Services are a support to help your child reach their potential and enhance their participation in the community. Educating and empowering you to help your child is

an important part of our holistic therapy services.

This brochure is a starting point for discussion about your child and your family. It offers ideas to create new activities your child is able to do with encouragement and support.



The way we work

- We recognise that family is central to therapy. Families bring knowledge and expertise about their child to help identify the child's needs, develop goals and practice strategies.
- The family, therapy team and teaching staff work together to identify problems and share ideas. Each has a role to play in developing the child's skills.
- We use every opportunity in the family's and child's routine and environment to develop skills.
- Therapists work as a multidisciplinary collaborative team, sharing skills to meet the needs of the child.
- We recognise the child's strengths and how they can be developed to increase participation in the activities of life.

AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems are used to help individuals who have difficulty communicating and interacting with others. AAC systems include the use of key word signing, conveyance of messages through use of picture symbols or objects, utilisation of picture or alphabet boards and/or use electronic voice output devices.

Any child who is experiencing delay or disorder within their speech and language development may be a candidate for an augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) system.

Question:

If my child gets an AAC system, will they become complacent and abandon the using speech?

Answer:

Research and clinical practice has shown that AAC systems do not interfere with speech development. In fact, many children demonstrate an increase in language, speech and communication skills once an AAC system is introduced.

Question:

My child uses some single words and gestures to communicate; he also has a Communication Book. Will introducing an electronic voice output device mean he will have to re-learn those skills on his new device?



Answer:

The best approach for a child who requires AAC is to have a menu of multiple systems. For example, the child may have a vocalisation that means “yes” and a gesture for “hello”. A simple system that plays messages for greeting friends in the playground, along with another device for carrying out more complex conversations could be used in addition to existing communication skills.

Device Selection

Selecting an appropriate device to suit your child ideally involves a team approach including:

- A team assessment, this includes the child who will be using the device, their family as well as the therapy team who are familiar with the child and experienced in the selection and implementation of AAC devices.

- A trial period in which the recommended AAC system(s) is used and its effectiveness is considered. The device should be trialled within all environments accessed by the child and with all communication partners such as teachers, school peers, siblings and family.



Ensuring your child's AAC system is a success

For an AAC System to be successful, all people that interact with your child will need to be aware of and able to assist them in the use of AAC systems and strategies. This can be very a challenging process, though it can be accomplished with careful planning and communication between all individuals involved in the child's life.

To achieve this, it is important to consider the following:

Routine meetings between your child, the therapy team and significant others involved in their life to determine programming and setting up of a support system for your child. This will allow you to discuss any issues you or others may be having. It will also allow you to cover vocabulary selection for the device, where and when the device will be used and how you will set up the environment for your child to use the device.

Training educators and family members on the use of the system. This will allow Education Assistants and teachers to learn to use the device to support their lessons. You can even teach your child's peers to become

familiar with it, so they can assist your child in using it at school and in the playground.

Motivation is a key element to successful use of AAC systems. Ensuring that your child is motivated to use their AAC system to communicate will lead to greater success in using it throughout their daily life and routine.

Example

Tim is a 6 year old boy with cerebral palsy. Tim uses Makaton signing and a communication book to communicate with those around him.

His parents feel that he would like to communicate more but does not have the means to do so.

After speaking to his therapy team, Tim, his family and his speech pathologist attended the Independent Living Centre (ILC), to look at a range of voice output devices that would best suit Tim.

Once a device was chosen to trial, the therapy team, family and school teachers met to discuss when and how to use the new voice output system and how to integrate it with Tim's current forms of communication throughout the day.

Training was provided so they could all support Tim in using the device and could all be consistent with the methods of its use.

Outcome

The device trialled by the family was a success. They had embedded its use into Tim's daily routine.

The school also reported that Tim was happy to use it throughout the day to join in various discussions and activities. Tim also maintained the use of his Makaton signing and communication book.

Glossary of Terms

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC): A means of communication to support or replace speech. For example, pictures, signing, alphabet board or electronic devices such as a computer or voice output aid.

Choice board: A board containing objects, pictures, and/or symbols which allow students to communicate by addressing snack/leisure activities, learning activities, transitioning, literacy activities, daily living activities, and more.

Communication books: These can be computer generated and/or hand-made. They can range from a single symbol to a single page to multiple pages either stored together or in the actual environments where they will be used.

High-tech devices: Including “Dynamic Display” software involve choices displayed on a computer monitor which automatically changes to different levels when a selections are made. This provides the user many different output methods, computer interfacing, built-in environmental control access, and more. The Dynavox is an example of a high tech dynamic display voice output device.



Low-Tech: Known as a “Static Display”, the communication setup does not automatically change when a selection is made.

Communication books, choice boards and Big Mac voice output buttons are examples of low tech AAC aides.

Makaton: Key word signing to support the communication development of children or adults who are unable to speak, or whose speech is difficult to understand.



Helpful/Useful Services:

ILC (The Independent Living Centre)

A not for profit service that provides expert advice on equipment, access and resources for people with disabilities and their families.

Address: The Niche, 11 Aberdare Rd, Nedlands, 6009

Ph: 1300 885 886 (free call)

www.ilc.com.au

CIS (Centre for Inclusive Schooling) provided through Department of Education and Training

CIS provides specialised professional learning, consultation and direct support services to school and district education staff. These services assist them in using strategies that maximise educational outcomes for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.