



Bloom ABA

THERAPY MATERIAL

AAC Quick-Start Guide

Getting started with Augmentative and Alternative Communication.

What is AAC

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is any tool or system that supports or replaces spoken communication — from picture cards to speech-generating tablet apps. AAC does not delay speech development; research consistently shows the opposite is more common: giving a child a reliable way to communicate often reduces frustration and can support spoken language development alongside it.

Types of AAC

- Unaided AAC — gestures, sign language, facial expression; needs no equipment
- Picture-based systems — PECS-style picture exchange, communication boards
- Low-tech AAC — laminated boards, communication books
- High-tech AAC — tablet or dedicated device apps with text-to-speech

Getting started at home

- ☐ Start with a small, meaningful vocabulary set — not the whole alphabet on day one
- ☐ Model the system yourself throughout the day, not just during "practice time"
- ☐ Respond to any communication attempt, even an imperfect one — reinforce the attempt
- ☐ Keep the tool physically present and accessible at all times, not put away
- ☐ Coordinate vocabulary with your child's speech-language pathologist and school

Common myths, addressed

- "AAC is a last resort." — It is a communication tool, appropriate at any stage, and can be introduced early.
- "It will stop my child from talking." — Evidence shows the opposite is more common.
- "My child isn't ready." — Readiness is rarely the right frame; most children benefit from earlier access, not later.
- "We tried it once and it didn't work." — Like any language system, AAC takes consistent modeling over time, not a single trial.

Vocabulary starter list

A practical first set — core words that apply across many situations, rather than only single nouns:

- Core words: more, stop, go, help, want, done, look, again
- People: mom, dad, [sibling names], me, you
- Feelings: happy, sad, mad, tired, hurt
- Everyday needs: eat, drink, bathroom, outside, home

When it feels like it isn't working

- Your child ignores the system — keep modeling anyway; comprehension usually arrives before independent use

- Vocabulary feels too limited — add words gradually rather than all at once, following your child's interests
- Meltdowns increase at first — this is often a sign the tool is working: your child now has a way to express frustration they couldn't before
- The device or app is confusing for you — ask your speech-language pathologist for a short parent tutorial; you do not need to master it alone

REMINDER

Progress with AAC is rarely linear. A quiet week does not mean it has stopped working — consistency over weeks and months is what builds fluency, not any single session.

Bloom ABA's speech-language pathologists work alongside our occupational therapists so communication goals connect with everyday routines, not just therapy time. Learn more at bloomaba.ca/services/#speech.