

# Supporting Augmentative and Alternative Communication at Home

---

Carolyn Parker  
Alt+Shift



# Copyright Notice

All course materials, including handouts, student video, and video of the training purposes only and may not be distributed, shared, or used for training purposes without express written consent from Alt+Shift.

Course authors hold the copyrights to all course materials and the intellectual property related to the course. Unauthorized use of these materials for distribution, sharing, or training purposes is not permitted.

For permission to distribute, share, or use as training materials, please contact [info@altshift.education](mailto:info@altshift.education).

# Supporting Augmentative and Alternative Communication at Home



October 2024

Alt+Shift is an *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) Grant Funded Initiative through the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education



# Disclaimer of Endorsement

The inclusion of references to particular items is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered.

# Please Note

In this webinar, Alt+Shift will provide information and resources regarding assistive technology best practices.

Student specific solutions, including the use of specific tools, are determined by your learner's IEP team. For assistance navigating IEP meetings, contact Michigan Alliance for Families. For assistance with disagreement resolution or complex meetings, contact [Special Education Mediation Services](https://www.mikids1st.org/) (<https://www.mikids1st.org/>).

# Accessibility Commitments

We have taken steps to ensure this deck is accessible.

- We used a tool(s) to perform an automated check (Grackle Slides and/or Microsoft Office accessibility checker).
- We also checked manually to ensure a clear reading order for screen reader users.
- We provided access to the deck for you. This means you can personalize your experience as we speak.
- We welcome any feedback for improving the experience.

# Nice to Meet You!

## Carolyn Parker

- Assistive Technology and AAC Specialist with Alt+Shift
- School-based Speech-Language Pathologist for 10 years
- University and private practice experience
- Mom of two boys



# What is AAC?

## Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

- Augmentative - I need another mode of communication to **support** my verbal speech.
- Alternative - I need another mode of communication as an **alternative** to verbal speech.



## Core Vocabulary Board



## Single Message Communication



## Multi-Level Speech Generating Device



## Communication Apps on a Tablet



## Non Electronic

### Communication Books



### Sequential Message Communication



### Simple Speech Generating Device



### Dedicated Speech Generating Device



## Electronic

# Five Tips for AAC at Home

Get  
comfortable

Keep it out  
and available

Model  
language

Encourage,  
don't require

Find your  
team

# Get Comfortable

No matter what tool your child uses - make sure that you take time to use it to get comfortable.



like	want	get	make	good	more
not	go	look	turn	help	different
I	he	open	do	put	same
you	she	that	up	all	some
it	here	in	on	can	finished
where	what	why	who	when	stop

The Picture Communication Symbols ©1981-2013 by Mayer-Johnson LLC. All Rights Reserved. Handmade. Used with permission.



# What is helpful to know?

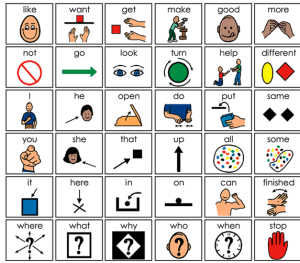
- Turning the device on/off
- Volume control
- Batteries/charging
- How to record or program new vocabulary
- Where to find your child's preferred items/activities

# How do I learn?

- Take time with the tool
- Find preferred vocabulary first
- Use song lyrics/movie quotes to learn new words
- Ask for videos of staff using AAC at school

# Something to consider...

If your student uses a paper-based communication tool, ask for extra copies.



If your student uses an electronic tool, ask if the company offers a free version of the software.



# Advice From a Parent #1

“I wish I could have gone back & taught my husband & any family/siblings around my child how to use the device. In the beginning I put so much pressure on myself to learn everything about this device and it would have been helpful to have more help & support with my daughter & her device.”

# Keep It Out and Available

- Keep AAC tools visible!
- Paper-based tools
  - Have copies available around the house
- Electronic tools
  - Keep it in one consistent place so you and your child know where to find it



# Start with One

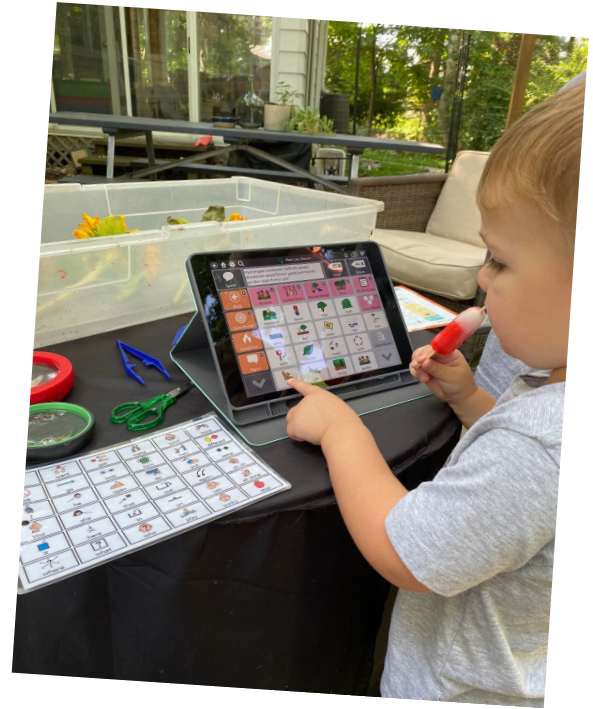
If starting with AAC feels overwhelming, pick one daily routine to start having AAC tools available.

- Meal time
- Brushing teeth
- Getting dressed/putting pajamas on
- Reading books

As you get comfortable with AAC in one routine, find other small areas/routines to incorporate the tool.

# Advice From a Parent #2

“Ensuring our child has access to their device all the time has allowed them to teach us new ways to use it, too.”



# Model Language

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqeAipcciVQ>

Modeling:  
Use AAC to teach  
AAC

AssistiveWare



# Model Through Mistakes

Letting your student see you make mistakes while modeling is ***powerful.***

You: I'm wondering what you might want for Christmas this year. I'm looking for the word 'Christmas' - I think it's in the Days/Times folder. Let's look - wait, it's not in here. I need to go back, and now I'm going to search for it. Oh, it's in the 'Holidays' folder!

# Advice From a Parent #3

“My daughter was most motivated in having the device around when we were coloring (so we would point to colors we were using on her device), or playing with farm animals (again tapping each farm animal we were playing with). We started slowly from there and it got easier!”

# What does it look like?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y430IP0Gpo0>



# Advice From a Parent #4

“Sometimes it can be frustrating teaching your child where/how to access new words. Be patient. Don’t be upset if they don’t follow along or choose to tell you something else instead. Communication at home may still need to be a combination of AAC use, facial expressions, gestures, etc. AAC definitely opens up a whole new window of opportunity, however.”

# Encourage, Don't Require

Everyone is a multimodal communicator! All communication attempts should be honored, including:

- vocalizations/words
- gestures/manual signs
- facial expressions
- AAC use

Avoid using phrases like 'now use your words' or 'say it on your device.'



# What does this look like?

**Example: You are asking your child what they would like to eat for dinner.**

You: (Find food page on device). Do you want pizza (model on device) or macaroni and cheese (model on device)?

Child: Points to pizza

You: You want pizza! Cheese or pepperoni (point to both options)?

Child: vocalizes 'pah'

You: I heard you say 'pah', I wonder if that means you want pepperoni.  
(look to child to confirm/deny)

# Advice From a Parent #5

“I wish I would have created less pressure of forcing communication & let her take the lead a little more instead of trying to overwhelm her with words. She does best with a supportive environment that encourages and reinforces AAC use without pressuring or forcing communication.”

# Find Your Team

- AAC is a big learning curve, don't take it on alone!
- It's okay to ask professionals about their experience with AAC
  - If they don't have experience, ask if they would be willing to attend a training on AAC
- Encourage family members, friends, or other significant people in your child's life to learn along with you
- ["To my fellow AAC parents" blog post](https://www.assistiveware.com/blog/parents-collaborate-aac-team)  
(<https://www.assistiveware.com/blog/parents-collaborate-aac-team>)

# Share Photos/Videos

Sharing photos and videos is a powerful way to stay connected, problem solve, and hold people accountable (if you need to!)



# Social Media

## Facebook

- AAC Family Fun
- Communication FIRST



## Instagram

@fightingformyvoice

@holdmywords

@tmorenoSLP

@mateomorenoaac

# Parent Resource #1

## Stepping into AAC

(<https://www.angelman.org/stepping-into-aac/>)

- online course for parents/caregivers
- 20 self-paced modules
- includes activities, resources, and videos
- FREE!

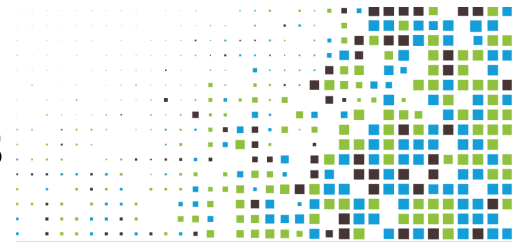


# Parent Resource #2

## Building Blocks to Autonomous Communication

(<https://www.altshift.education/professional-learning/online-modules/building-blocks-autonomous-communication-bbtac>)

- online modules for educators and parents/family members
- 7 'blocks'/modules that are self-paced
- includes activities, resources, and videos
- FREE!



Building Blocks to  
**Autonomous Communication**

# Parent Resource #3

## Michigan Disability Rights Coalition

(<https://mymdrc.org/assistive-tech-program/>)

- assistive technology lending library
- device loans
- at-home device demonstrations
- assistance with funding
- online webinars



**Michigan Disability  
Rights Coalition**

With liberty and access for all.



# Review

Get  
comfortable

Keep it out  
and available

Model  
language

Encourage,  
don't require

Find your  
team

# Finally...

If you could go back to when your child first was introduced to AAC, what is something you would tell yourself, or something you wished you would have known?

# If I Could Go Back #1

“It won't stop her from gaining words. Our daughter can vocalize a few things like "more" "no" "hi" "bye" ect. and I never thought she would. She now sings with us as well and will try any word we ask her to - I was worried that by using the AAC she would never 'try' to talk.”

# If I Could Go Back #2

“I wish I would have understood it didn’t need to be used a certain way. Communication can happen without full sentences. The device does not need to look like the default setup, you can truly customize it whichever way works best for your child.”

## If I Could Go Back #3

“I would have given myself & my daughter some grace.”

# Thank you!

## What questions or comments do you have?

Please reach out!

[carolyn.parker@altshift.education](mailto:carolyn.parker@altshift.education)

altshift.education



# We are here to support you!



@MichiganAllianceForFamilies



@michiganallianceforfamilies



/MichiganAlliance

For more information visit

[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

Call 800-552-4821

En Español 313-217-1060

248-963-0607 للغة العربية

[info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)



# Michigan Alliance for Families

Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Michigan's federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

1-800-552-4821

[info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

