



SPECIAL EDUCATION RIGHTS: ILLINOIS EDITION



Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

This fact sheet answers:

- What is AAC and how can it help?
- How do I know if my child needs AAC?
- Who pays for AAC?
- How do I help my child use AAC?
- And more

What is AAC?

AAC stands for **Augmentative and Alternative Communication**. AAC is a term for all forms of communication other than talking out loud. AAC devices can be as simple as picture books or as complex as an app on a tablet. Some people call AAC a “talker”.

AAC devices can be used in many ways to help different children, like:

- Switch: Your child uses simple movements like pressing a button
- Eye gaze: Your child controls a device by looking at words on a screen
- Stylus: Your child uses a hand-held pointer for touchscreen devices
- Head mouse: Your child's head movements control the device

How do I know if my child needs AAC?

AAC may be helpful if your child:

- Struggles with talking out loud
- Understands more than they can say
- Receives speech services
- Uses behaviors to communicate



How can AAC help my child?

AAC may help if your child's ability to speak does not meet their needs. AAC can add to your child's speech or can be used instead of speech.

Who pays for AAC?

If your child's IEP team decides that she needs AAC, the school must pay for it. The IEP team cannot say no to AAC because of the price. When the school pays for an AAC device, it belongs to the school. Your child can still bring the device home after school and use it over the summer.

Does my child's school have to give her AAC?

Yes. If your child's IEP team decides that she needs AAC to learn, the school must give her AAC. This means that the IEP team should:

- Put the AAC in your child's IEP
- Buy the AAC
- Teach you and your child how to use it
- Fix the AAC if it breaks

If your child already owns an AAC device, then the school must use the device.

Anyone who uses the AAC with your child should be trained to use it. This includes you, teachers, therapists, and aides. The school should put any training in your child's IEP.



How can I get my child tested for AAC?

If the school team decides that your child does not need AAC, you can ask for a formal AAC test. You can also ask for help from your child's outside providers.

AAC tests are available for people with disabilities through schools and early intervention. The test must be done within 60 school days. The 60-day timeline starts when you say yes to the test. During the test, a speech language pathologist will watch your child try different devices. If your child does well with an AAC device, the person doing the test will recommend a trial. The testing process will be done when the results are put in your child's IEP.

You can ask for AAC tests at any time and should ask for one if you think it will help your child. You should ask for the tests in writing, like an email. If your child gets AAC, the IEP team should add the AAC to your child's IEP. It usually goes in the "Special Factors" section. The IEP should say your child can take the AAC home after school.

Where can my child use AAC?

After your child's IEP team gives her the AAC, it can be used at school during every class period and at home. The school may ask you to sign an agreement that you will only use the AAC for communication.

How do I help my child use AAC?

You can help your child by making sure you are trained to use their AAC device. Anyone who uses AAC with your child should be trained to use it.

Your child should get more speech therapy services after they get an AAC device. You should keep in touch with the school's speech therapist. You can ask for a new test if it seems needed.

What should I do if my child stops using their AAC?

If your child stops using their AAC, ask for a new test to see if a new device would be more helpful. You can also see if other access methods would be easier for your child, like a switch, eye gaze, stylus, or head mouse.



What happens after graduation?

If the school paid for the AAC device, then it belongs to the school and you must give it back after graduation. If you want your child to own the AAC, or have one after graduation, you can apply for one through Medicaid. Ask an AAC seller to help you apply. For more information, visit: www.aacfunding.com/funding-101.

If your child's needs an AAC device to get a job, you can ask the Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) to pay for the device. For more information about DRS, contact our Client Assistance Program (CAP) at 855-425-2725. ■



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Have More Questions?

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