



Jane Mullen

Using Alternative Methods to Communicate.

Many people are familiar with Stephen Hawking's 'artificial' voice, this is produced using a communication aid that he controls by twitching a muscle in his face. There are lots of different aids available. Some devices can deliver thousands of words, others just one.

A communication aid helps a person to communicate more effectively with those around them. These aids range from communication books, symbol pointing, talking switches, simple letter boards to sophisticated pieces of computer equipment. For more information on this please contact us at Jane Mullen Speech Therapy Ltd and we will discuss your options.

Communication aids that speak

- These aids use either - artificial or pre-recorded - to speak letters, words or phrases that the user has chosen. To see the variety of devices available go to www.speechbubble.org.uk.
- The simplest speaking aids are sturdy battery-powered devices whose single message lasts for a few seconds and can be re-recorded as many times as needed by speaking into a microphone built into the unit.
- More complex speaking aids tend to have their words and phrases stored in 'levels'. Many display can change at the press of a finger to reveal a new screen containing a different set of messages
- Devices are now available as app's that can be downloaded onto an iPod

Strategies to help children who use alternative communication (AAC)

- WAIT - the AAC user takes longer than natural speakers to initiate a communication attempt.
- Look for non-verbal clues, especially gestures
- Make time for informal chats without a fixed agenda
- Don't always stick to safe topics. Ask questions about something you genuinely don't know about.
- Check with the user that you have understood - don't assume that you have, and never pretend that you have
- If a misunderstanding is occurring, give possible interpretations of what the user is trying to say rather than definitive ones
- Using a communication aid is slow. Initially the user may only be able to use one or two words. As unaided speakers we use 150-200 words per minute. The equivalent for an aided speaker is between 5 and 20 words

Written with reference to 'Developing Augmentative and Alternative Communication Policies in Schools' available from www.ace-centre.org.uk

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