

# Assistive Technology for Communication Roadmap

Assistive technology can be used to support and enhance communication for people with autism, regardless of speech ability. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is a specific type of assistive technology that can benefit people with autism of all ages by promoting independence, expanding communication, and increasing social interactions.

**Know your Rights:** It's important to remember that limited speech does not mean a person with autism has less to say. In fact, assistive technology should expand communication beyond basic wants and needs and include all aspects of one's personality. Assistive technology takes many forms and professional evaluation and training are important to maximize effectiveness.

Follow the steps below to learn how to get started using assistive technology for communication.

## 1. COMPLETE A COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT

Every person with autism has different strengths and needs. It is important to work with an evaluation team to complete a **Communication or AAC Assessment**. The evaluation team should always include the person with autism and a licensed speech-language pathologist or SLP, and may also include AAC specialists, therapists, doctors, and teachers.

***Begin by requesting a communication assessment from your school district, Medicaid case manager, or directly from an SLP. Questions the communication assessment should answer:***

- ***What is the best way for the user to ACCESS a communication system?***
- ***What kind of LANGUAGE SYSTEM is appropriate for the user?***
- ***What devices or systems MATCH the user's strengths and needs?***

## 2. CHOOSING A DEVICE AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

There are many types of AAC options available with different functions and costs. It is important to make an informed choice by matching the type of device to the specific strengths and needs of the AAC user.

***Low-Tech:*** Typically lowest cost, requires little training, emphasizes social exchange and requesting  
*ie. communication boards or books, picture exchange communication system*

***Mid-Tech:*** Speech generating device, requires more training, customizable, fixed display  
*ie. voice output communication aides (VOCA), Quick Talker<sup>®</sup>, Go Talk<sup>®</sup>*

***High-Tech:*** Speech generating devices with dynamic display, most customizable options, apps *ie. tablets, iPads, Dynavox*

***Dedicated System:*** Devices dedicated to communication only, more likely to be covered by insurance

***Open System:*** Devices used for communication and other purposes (wi-fi, etc.)



### 3. FUNDING PATHWAYS FOR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY



#### SCHOOL DISTRICT

Students receiving special education services have a legal right to AAC assessments and supports to meet their communication needs.

##### *How to begin:*

**FIRST**, request an AAC assessment in writing from school district and work with a SLP to complete AAC assessment and identify appropriate AAC strategy.

**THEN**, update your IEP to include AAC strategy:

- include needed software or apps
- add AAC goals ie. “with verbal response”
- require AAC use 24 hours a day/AAC devices will remain with student at all times
- incorporate training for the AAC user, teachers and parents/guardians

#### PRIVATE INSURANCE

Private insurance may cover the cost of medically necessary AAC devices with a prescription from a medical provider or Speech-Language Pathologist.

##### *How to begin:*

**FIRST**, contact your insurance company to request policy on Durable Medical Equipment (DME) or assistive technology. A doctor or SLP may need to complete the request.

**THEN**, consult with an Language Pathologist to complete AAC assessment and identify appropriate AAC strategy. Your insurance will require you to submit proof of medical necessity or letters of recommendation by a medical provider and/or the licensed SLP.

#### MEDICAID

Medicaid can cover the cost of medically necessary AAC devices with a prescription from a medical provider or Speech-Language Pathologist.

##### *How to begin:*

**FIRST**, contact your Medicaid service coordinator or case worker to learn how to apply for AAC device as Durable Medical Equipment (DME).

**THEN**, you will need to provide proof of medical necessity or letters of recommendation by a medical provider and/or a licensed speech-language pathologist. Your Medicaid coordinator can help you find a SLP to complete an AAC assessment and identify appropriate AAC strategy. Update your Individual Service Plan to include AAC strategy goals and training for user and caregivers.

#### PRIVATE PAY/GRANTS EQUIPMENT DONATIONS

Limited grant funding for AAC devices may be provided by local and national organizations. Regional Assistive Technology Centers may loan or provide donated AAC technology. Assistive Technology may be funded by your Health Savings Accounts, Flexible Spending Accounts, or ABLE accounts (529A savings accounts). Confirm with your account administrator.

##### *How to begin:*

**Contact Autism Speaks’ Autism Response Team** for help searching for funding assistance programs.

**1-888 AUTISM2 (288-4762)**  
**En Español: 1-888-772-9050**  
FamilyServices@AutismSpeaks.org

### 4. TRAINING FOR SUCCESSFUL USE



No matter how you fund your AAC device, be sure to **work with a speech-language pathologist or behavior therapist** to provide training to the AAC user, caregivers, and service providers.

**Consistently incorporate the AAC device into all communication**, across all settings: at school, home, or in the community.

**From young children to older adults** – it’s never too late to update and improve access to AAC communication supports for a person with autism.

**Monitor and adjust the AAC strategy** over time and make updates to the system as needed.

**Have more questions?**

**Contact Autism Speaks Autism Response Team today for personalized assistance:**

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