



# AAC FOR CAREGIVERS



## MANUAL



Serving people with  
disabilities since 1964

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## **Introduction**

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) refers to all forms of communication that enhance or supplement verbal speech or writing. It is an internationally recognised area of clinical and educational practice that attempts to compensate, temporarily or permanently, for significant speech, language, and writing disabilities (NIDRR Consensus Statement, 1992).

The *AAC for Caregivers* program was borne out of the strong conviction that AAC has to be implemented at home and in other natural settings for real success. The *AAC for Caregivers* material has been used with caregivers who support individuals who use AAC in one-on-one and group settings. The group facilitation approach saw caregivers coming together in small groups to learn, discuss and share their experiences of using the AAC strategies with each other.

This resource is produced by the Specialised Assistive Technology Centre (ATC), SPD in conjunction with their *AAC for Caregivers* program. SPD is a charity in Singapore set up to help people with disabilities of all ages to maximise their potential and integrate them into mainstream society. The Specialised ATC in SPD conducts assessments and intervention for people with disabilities who need Assistive Technology to live, learn, work and play. They also provide training for caregivers and professionals who actively engage with persons with disabilities. For more information about the *AAC for Caregivers* program, please email [atc@spd.org.sg](mailto:atc@spd.org.sg).

This resource can be used as a manual or as separate handouts for caregivers or professionals working with individuals who use AAC. You can...

- ✓ Download the manual and try out the strategies with your child/ the individual under your care
- ✓ Guide caregivers through strategies in this manual and follow up with them in AAC intervention sessions

There are eight strategies covered in this manual:

1. Aided Language Stimulation
2. Following Your Child's Lead
3. Teaching Core Vocabulary
4. The Art of Waiting
5. The Hierarchy of Prompts
6. Our Daily Routine
7. Personalizing Your Child's Voice
8. I Always Have My Voice

These strategies have been trialed and adapted to the local Singaporean context. There are also suggestions for where, when and how to use the strategies. As this manual was developed in Singapore, illustrations and video examples are relevant to Singapore, Malaysia and possibly the South East Asia region/ culture. The strategies are designed to provide caregivers with a set of practical tools to be able to facilitate more effective communication with their children/ individuals under their care. The goal is better, stronger relationships through more effective communication!

*'For my kids to be able to use AAC, is worth more than striking Toto (lottery). I am very happy! Within a few months they learned so much. Through **AAC for Caregivers**, we caregivers have really benefited from learning together'*

*– Vivian, mother of Anders and Jonas, twins who use AAC*

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### *Acknowledgements*

Deborah would like to thank everyone in the Specialised Assistive Technology Centre, SPD for their ongoing support and guidance in realising *AAC for Caregivers*. She gratefully acknowledges Sarah M. Yong for her valuable contribution. This resource was also made possible by the generous #ISAAC2018 Conference AAC Lightning Pitch cash prize, supported by @ISAACinternational and Deakin University.

Please note: throughout this manual 'the individual' will be referred to as 'he'.



## **Strategy 1      Aided Language Stimulation**

### **WHAT**

Aided Language Stimulation is an approach in which the facilitator points out picture symbols on an individual's communication display in conjunction with ongoing language stimulation. Through the modeling process, the concept of using the pictorial symbols interactively is demonstrated for the individual.”

– Goossens', Crain, & Elder (1992)

### **WHY**

Individuals who use AAC require models to learn how to communicate effectively.

Just like how a child learning how to talk has models in the form of adults, siblings and peers who talk to him, an individual learning how to use his AAC system requires models too. This means that communication partners should use the same AAC system when communicating with the individual who uses AAC.

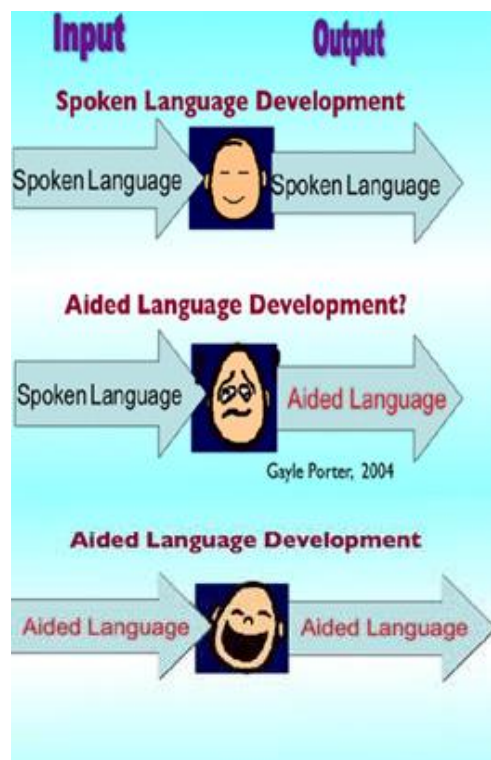


Image taken from Gayle Porter, 2004

## HOW

1. Make sure that the individual is attending to the AAC device. Get down to the individual's eye level if needed!



2. Create a message with the selected icons and repeat it verbally to the individual.

*We need to OPEN (point to the symbol for OPEN)  
the BAG (point to the symbol for BAG)  
and PUT the DUMPLINGS IN (point to the symbol for PUT, DUMPLINGS, IN)  
the BOWL (point to the symbol BOWL).*

To better understand how to provide Aided Language Stimulation, visit the following link to view a video starring Lim En Ting and family: <https://bit.ly/2KBG6Ze>

Siblings make great communication partners too as they can provide Aided Language Stimulation and are great fun to be with!

## WHEN

I will try to use Aided Language Stimulation in...

Situation 1:

---

Situation 2:

---

## REFERENCES

Goossens', C., Crain, S., & Elder, P. (1992). Engineering the Classroom Environment for Interactive Symbolic Communication – An Emphasis on the Developmental Period, 18 Months to Five Years. Birmingham, AL: Southeast Augmentative Communication Publications.

Porter, G. (2004) Young children developing language using AAC, AGOSCI National Tour, Australia

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## Strategy 2      Following Your Child's Lead (4Ls)

### WHAT

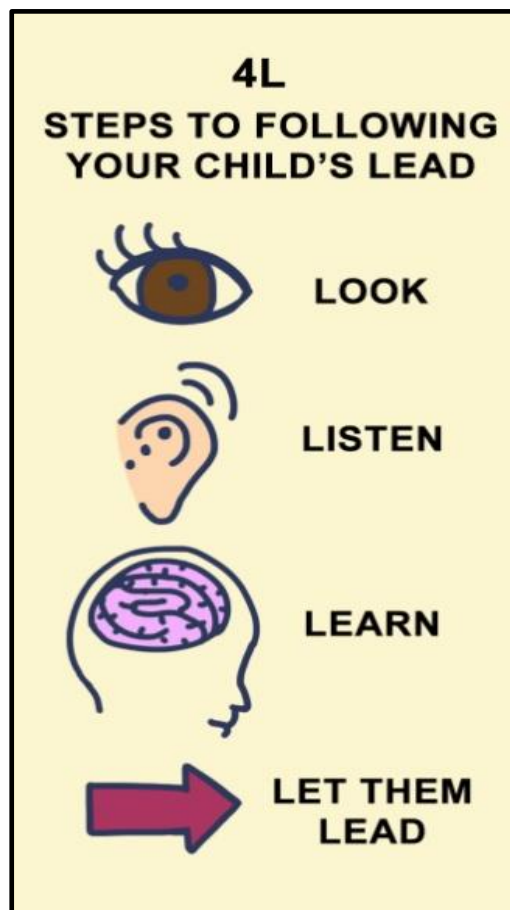
*Following Your Child's Lead* is a strategy in communication that suggests being present, observant & responsive to your child. This is as individuals of all ages have their own agendas, including the individual who uses AAC. We all learn best when we are interested in something.

### WHY

Features of this minimally intrusive model have been shown to effect language development in the following areas

- the advancement of children's vocabulary, morpho-syntax, semantic and pragmatic skills (Wong et al., 2012; McDuffie & Yoder, 2010)
- improved parental language facilitation skills (Kim & Mahoney, 2004)
- generalisation of intervention outcomes (Roberts & Kaiser, 2011)

### HOW



at what the individual is interested in and the gestures they use

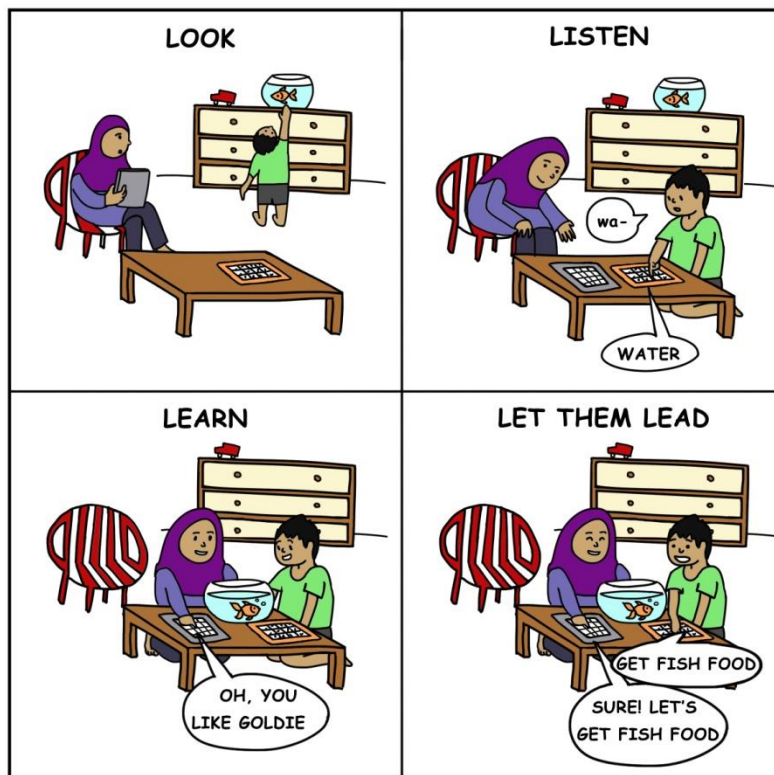
to what they say with their communication system/ word approximations

about their interests and hopes

the way in your caregiver-child interaction



Let's live out the 4Ls!



**WHEN**

I will try to follow my child's lead in...

Situation 1:

\_\_\_\_\_

Situation 2:

\_\_\_\_\_

**REFERENCES**

Wong, T.-P., Moran, C. & Foster-Cohen, S. (2012). The effects of expansions, questions and cloze procedures on children's conversational skills. *Clinical Linguistics & Phonetics* 26(3): 273-287.

McDuffie, A. & Yoder, P.J. (2010). Types of parent verbal responsiveness that predict language in young children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research* 53(4): 1026-1039.

Kim, J.M. & Mahoney, G. (2004). The effects of mother's style of interaction on children's engagement implications for using Responsive Interventions with parents. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* 24(1): 31-38.

Roberts, M.Y. & Kaiser, A.P. 2011. The effectiveness of parent-implemented language interventions: A meta-analysis. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 20(3): 180-199.

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## Strategy 3      Teaching Core Vocabulary

### WHAT

#### Core Vocabulary

- refers to words used with high frequency
- are vocabulary that make up about 75-80% of the words we use everyday
- should be a main part of all AAC systems because it allows for most flexibility across most situations
- examples include: I, WANT, HELP, OPEN, MORE, LIKE, GO, STOP, IN, YES, NO

#### Fringe Vocabulary

- is used in a continuum of low-frequency to lower frequency situations (e.g. 'kopitiam', 'Redhill MRT station')
- includes personal vocabulary for individual needs, interests, work, school, or even community

### WHY

Core Vocabulary allows individuals to communicate across all situations, in all settings, and with all their communication partners. Intentional teaching of core vocabulary in the home setting or in daily routines can help individuals learn to use core vocabulary for more effective communication.

### HOW



Teaching Core Vocabulary OPEN

	Steps (Zangari, 2012)	My plan
1	<b>Introduce the new word(s) using focused AIDED language stimulation</b>	I will ensure that the individual is looking at the AAC device when I provide Aided Language Stimulation. E.g. OPEN THE BOTTLE, OPEN THE DOOR
2	<b>Teach the new word(s) with explicit instruction activities;</b>	I will emphasize the word OPEN by using a slightly louder tone and exaggerating my movements while turning the bottle cap or opening the car door
3	<b>Elaborate on the new word meanings with engaging practice activities;</b>	I will also model the word OPEN when opening the refrigerator/ cupboard to retrieve the individual's favourite foods or opening a drawer to access a favourite toy.
4	<b>Provide repeated exposure to the new word(s) on an ongoing basis; and,</b>	I will repeat OPEN daily and use OPEN in different ways – including opening an app on the iPad and going to a shop that is OPEN.
5	<b>Check for understanding and reteach, as necessary.</b>	I will monitor if the individual understands OPEN and responds accordingly in our interactions at home. I will also observe if the individual starts using OPEN independently.

**WHEN**

Core Vocabulary 1: I will try to teach \_\_\_\_\_ in...

Situation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Situation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Core Vocabulary 2: I will try to teach \_\_\_\_\_ in...

Situation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Situation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

**REFERENCES**

Zangari, C (November 3, 2012) Vocabulary Instruction In AAC [Web log post]. Retrieved Nov 21, 2018, from <http://practicalaac.org>

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## **Strategy 4**      **The Art of Waiting**

### **WHAT**

Everyone who uses AAC needs enough time.

Caregivers and communication partners need to provide enough of it for the person using AAC to

- claim their turn in the conversation
- process what was said and what they want to say
- compose their message

Provide a wait time (up to 45 seconds) to support people who use AAC to claim more conversation turns and use more words (Mathis, 2010).

### **WHY**

In AAC intervention, sometimes a pause is more powerful than anything we can do or say. It is more effective than us repeating or rephrasing, because those can interfere with processing. Waiting is also more helpful than a question or a command, because overuse of those can build prompt dependency or learned helplessness (Zangari, 2014).

### **HOW**

1. Wait for the individual to talk, don't say a word, and keep looking at them.
2. Show how interested you are (you can arch your body towards the individual).
3. Count in your head (One a thousand, Two a thousand...). That may feel like a long time, but it is okay.



Note: At the Specialised ATC, Clinical Manager Sarah Yong has found that it is often when the silence becomes awkward and she feels pressured to say something that the individual initiates a conversation/ takes their turn.

Wait! Because magic can happen.

## WHEN

I will practice the Art of Waiting in ...

Situation 1:

---

Situation 2:

---

## REFERENCES

Mathis, H.J. (2010) The effect of pause time upon the communicative interactions of young people who use augmentative and alternative communication (Master's thesis). Retrieved from Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No 3248)

Zangari, C (July 29, 2014) On Not Talking [Web log post]. Retrieved Nov 21, 2018, from <http://practicalaac.org/>

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## Strategy 5 The Hierarchy of Prompts

### WHAT

Prompts support us in remembering what to do and are adapted to our needs. They ensure that learning takes place and goals can be achieved. This is true of using AAC to communicate too.

As the individual's abilities improve, the amount and type of prompts needed decrease. Therefore, we follow a hierarchy of prompts to ensure we are always working towards maximizing the individual's independence with that particular skill. (Rocky Bay, 2010)

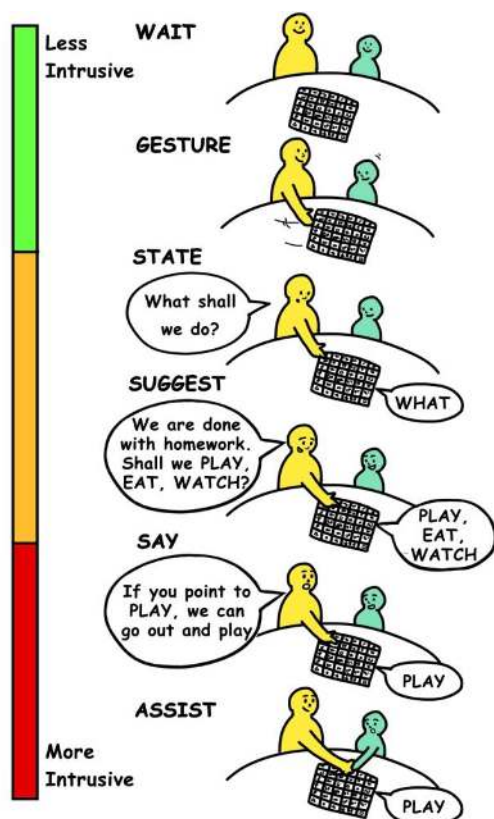
### WHY

We often naturally use prompts to help our children achieve success in AAC because they are still learning how to use their AAC system to communicate.

However, we need to consider the danger of *prompt dependence* and *learned helplessness*. We have seen too many individuals who use AAC seek prompts even though they are able to do it independently.

In daily communication, we utilise the least-to-most prompting sequence.

### HOW



Wait for him to talk, don't say a word, and keep looking at him. Show how interested you are. Count to five in your head. It may feel awkward at first, but it is okay.

If there is no initiation, glance down at/ touch his talker (AAC device) and smile encouragingly. This is a reminder, that he should be taking his turn.

Make a general statement. You can also ask 'Do you have something to say?'

Be more direct or use Partner Assisted Scanning (read out and point to a few choices to suggest to the individual what he can say).

Tell the individual what to say and point to that particular symbol.

Physically take the individual's hand to touch the symbol for play.

## WHEN

I will practice using the Hierarchy of Prompts in ...

Situation 1:

---

Situation 2:

---

## REFERENCES

Rocky Bay (October, 2010) Prompting Techniques to Support AAC Use [Web log post]. Retrieved Nov 21, 2018, from: <https://www.rockybay.org.au/>

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## Strategy 6      Our Daily Routine

### WHAT

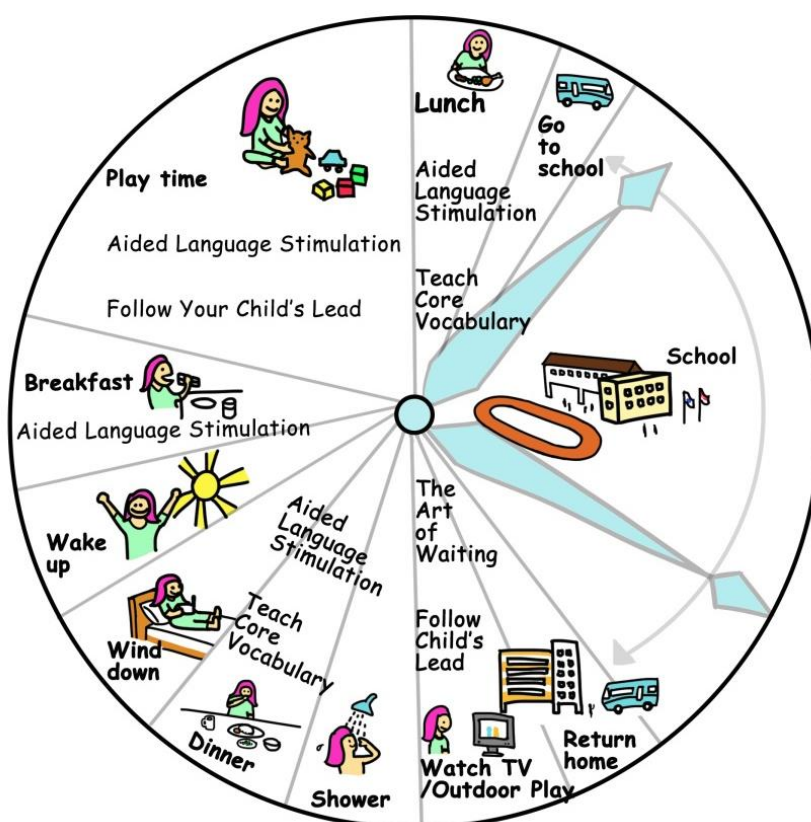
The daily routine the individual has is the best place to start looking for opportunities to put into practice all the AAC strategies you have learnt so far. Just like us, they become proficient in activities they do every day!

### WHY

Skills learnt in AAC intervention sessions are often not well generalized into the daily lives of people who use AAC. Research by Raab & Dunst (2004) and Jung (2007) has shown that early intervention services provided in natural environments more effectively promote children's development than traditional intervention models provided in clinic offices or specialized programs.

When care providers use daily routines as the context for a child's developmental interventions, they can integrate them into natural activities without disrupting the flow of what children are doing and learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). This also helps to ensure that the individual gets plenty of Aided Language Stimulation, teaching and opportunities to communicate. It is also a good place to look out for vocabulary to put into the individual's AAC system! Our ultimate goal is for individuals who use AAC to demonstrate autonomous communication in all settings.

### HOW





1. Think through the individual’s daily routine and fill up the table below (3 examples have been provided). Attach a separate sheet of paper for extra space to complete the table.

2. Decide on the best times to practice your strategies at home

*Strategy Recap: Aided Language Stimulation; Following Your Child’s Lead; Teaching Core Vocabulary; The Art of Waiting; The Hierarchy of Prompts*

Time	Activity	Strategies	Comments
9am	Breakfast	-Aided Language Stimulation	Morning Greetings: GOOD MORNING WEI YI Talk about breakfast choices: WE HAVE PORRIDGE OR KAYA PUFFS FOR BREAKFAST. WHICH ONE WOULD YOU LIKE?
10am	Play time	-Aided Language Stimulation -Follow Your Child’s Lead	I will take out a bunch of toys and see which toy Wei Yi chooses. I will model language around that activity. I will attempt to comment about her play.
12pm	Lunch time	-Aided Language Stimulation - Teaching Core Vocabulary	LUNCH IS READY. TIME TO EAT! I will model the word EAT in a sentence and then repeat EAT occasionally when I bring my spoon to my mouth. I will also exaggerate my chewing slightly. I will repeat this again during snack and dinner time.

3. Think of the difficulties you may face and how to overcome them

## WHEN

I will try strategies 1-5 in parts of my daily routine. I will start with the following routines:

Routine 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Routine 2: \_\_\_\_\_

## REFERENCES

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention. New York: Harper Perennial

Jung, L.A. (2007). Writing individualized family service plan strategies that fit into the ROUTINE. Young Exceptional Children, 10(3), 21-27.

Raab, M., & Dunst, C. (2004). Early intervention practitioner approaches to natural environment interventions. Journal of Early Intervention, 27, 15-26.

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## Strategy 7      Personalizing Your Child's Voice

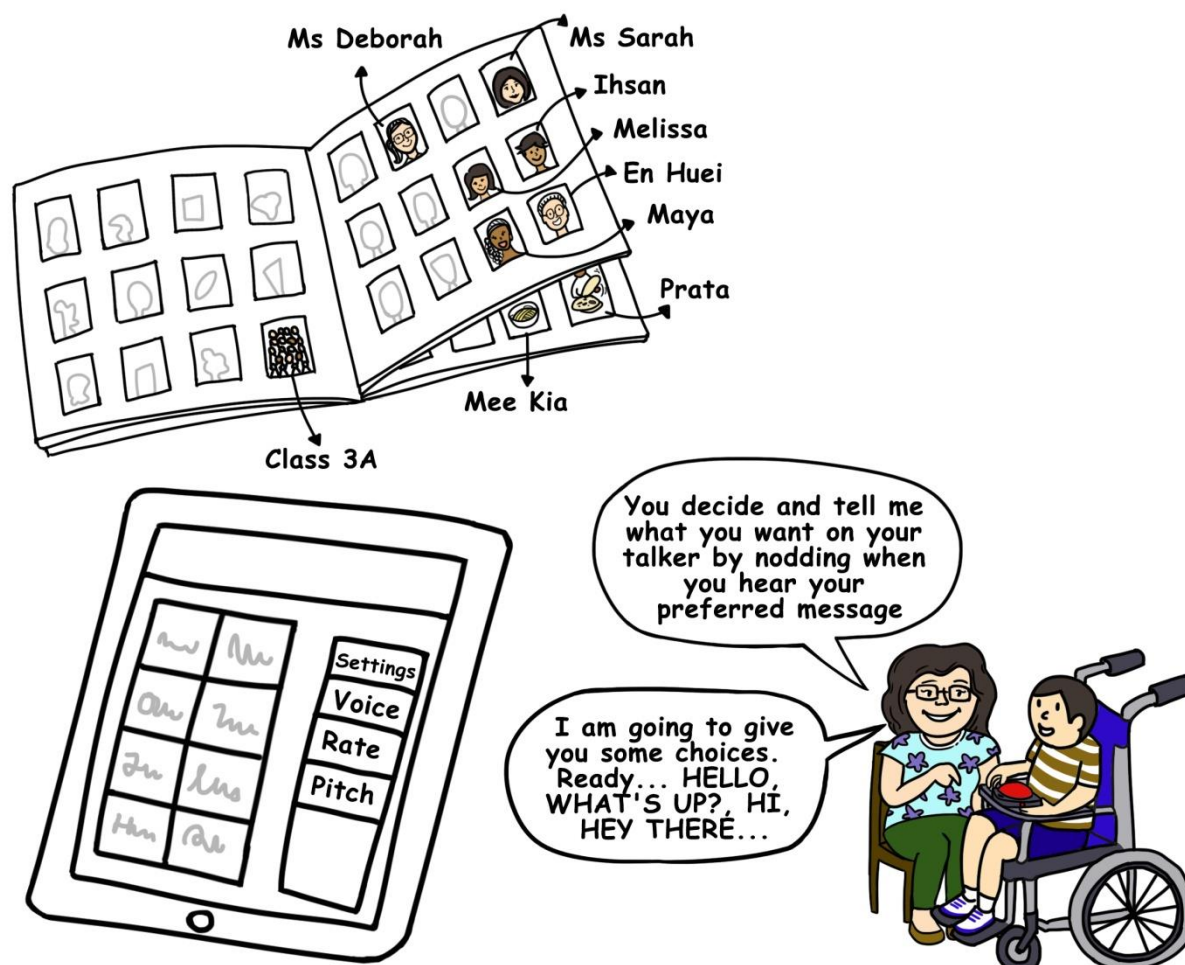
### WHAT

Personalizing Your Child's Voice refers to editing the individual's AAC system to make it their voice.

It may involve the following...

1. Inserting information about the individual in the folder 'About Me'
2. Adding important names, specific words, personalized social phrases etc to the individual's AAC system
3. Changing the voice, speech rate, number of rows required for the message bar etc on the individual's AAC system
4. Co-constructing personal stories to share with others

The individual who uses AAC should be involved in the process too by determining the placement of additional symbols/ preferred symbol for a certain word/ speech rate etc.



## WHY

A personalized AAC system is important so that the individual is able to communicate his needs efficiently and for him to realize that using AAC is fun! It helps reinforce the fact that the AAC system is indeed his voice!

Caution: Good AAC systems come with research-based core word vocabularies designed for individuals who use AAC. It is suggested that with robust AAC systems, editing of the AAC system can focus on the 4 areas suggested under the 'WHAT' section and movement or deletion of core words and the general template should be avoided if possible. This is as it will affect motor planning in accessing the AAC system and may affect efficacy of Aided Language Stimulation by professionals in a group setting (due to the huge difference in an individual's AAC system when compared to the general template of the same AAC system). Do review why we provide Aided Language Stimulation in the first place!

## HOW

1. Find out from your AAC team on how to edit the AAC system
2. Search for the AAC system manual online and refer to it (if applicable)
3. Add a button in the AAC system that says 'Please add a word to my device'.  
The individual who uses AAC should be taught how to use the button effectively.

## WHEN

I will start to personalize my child's AAC system by...

(Tick all that apply)

- Inserting personal information in the folder 'About Me'
- Adding important names, specific words, personalized social phrases etc
- Changing the voice, speech rate, number of rows required for the message bar etc
- Co-constructing personal stories with my child to share with others

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## **Strategy 8**      **I Always Have My Voice**

### **WHAT**

*I Always Have My Voice* refers to the individual having his AAC system with him at all times! This includes school time, outdoor play time, mealtimes and the list goes on.

This strategy requires us to ensure that the AAC device gets charged when the individual is not using it or attaching a power bank to it. It also means that even if the individual is repeatedly pressing buttons on his AAC device instead of listening in class, you should teach him to use a 'quiet voice' (just like how you would with other neuro-typically developing individuals) and not take the AAC device away from him.

### **WHY**

Just as you shouldn't (and can't) take away an individual's voice, you shouldn't take away an individual's AAC device. This ensures that they *always have a voice* in any situation and allows them to seize any communication opportunity that comes up.

If the individual is using sign language, you don't need to worry about it because his hands are always there. However, if the individual is using picture symbols or a device of some kind, you will want to make sure the device is with him and functioning at all times (Clark, 2013).



## HOW

1. Refer to the individual's routine in the handout - Strategy 6 (Our Daily Routine)
2. Plan how the individual can carry his voice or retrieve his voice independently in all situations
3. Think of possible hurdles to the individual carrying his voice wherever he goes
4. Come up with a plan on how to tackle the hurdles when they happen

## WHERE

A) Indoors

How will the individual retrieve his voice independently/ always have his voice?

Solution:

---

---

B) Outdoors

How will the individual carry his voice?

Solution:

---

---

## REFERENCES

Clark, C (March 12, 2013) Teach your child to use an AAC device [Web log post]. Retrieved Nov 21, 2018, from <https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com>

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CONGRATULATIONS!

You have now learned 8 strategies that can be used to support communication with your child/ the individual under your care.

Do always remember

- 1) to encourage autonomous communication
- 2) to support full and effective participation (in your child's various social roles)
- 3) to trust that you have what it takes to be your child's best advocate

“If all my possessions were taken from me with one exception,  
I would choose to keep the power of communication,  
for by it I would soon regain all the rest”  
— Daniel Webster