



# Week 17: AAC on the Go



## AACTion Steps

[StepInAAC.org/A-Week17](http://StepInAAC.org/A-Week17) (Online / PDF)

Core words: when, put, on  
Communication function: Explaining



## Sign Posts (videos)

[StepInAAC.org/P-Week17](http://StepInAAC.org/P-Week17) (YouTube playlist)

17-1: Language Walk-Through: Shopping  
Video: [StepInAAC.org/V17-1-LWT-Shopping](http://StepInAAC.org/V17-1-LWT-Shopping)

Videos to review related to “AAC on the Go” (included in playlist)

5-2: Think Aloud with AAC  
Video: [StepInAAC.org/V5-2-ThinkAloud](http://StepInAAC.org/V5-2-ThinkAloud)

11-2: Model Self-Advocacy: “No” & “Different”  
Video: [StepInAAC.org/V11-2-NoDifferent](http://StepInAAC.org/V11-2-NoDifferent)

15-1: Before-During-After  
Video: [StepInAAC.org/V15-1-BeforeDuringAfter](http://StepInAAC.org/V15-1-BeforeDuringAfter)

16-1: AAC Always Available  
Video: [StepInAAC.org/V16-1-AlwaysAvailable](http://StepInAAC.org/V16-1-AlwaysAvailable)



## Travelog (newsletter)

[StepInAAC.org/N-Week17](http://StepInAAC.org/N-Week17) (Online / PDF)

Topics:

- Developing a Vision for Successful AAC Use
- Beyond Good Intentions
- More to Explore

**Question of the Week:** "We've been at this AAC thing for awhile now. How do I know if I'm doing it right?"



This week, let's focus on talking about where we are going and how we are getting there. A lot of people benefit from talking about what is coming up. Whether you are headed to the grocery store or a doctor's appointment, talk about it before you go. Plan a few extra minutes to talk about when you are leaving, what you have to put on before you leave, and if you will use a car, bus, or another way to get where you're going.

### Hands-on Activities

#### Day 1

**PLAY:** If it's too busy when it's time to leave, play "get ready" games and "PUT ON" hats, shoes, or jackets. "WHEN it's raining, we need..."

#### Day 2

**PLAN:** Look ahead and think about what you might talk about when you're on the go. Getting ready? When you leave? Plan 1-2 things you could say.

#### Day 3

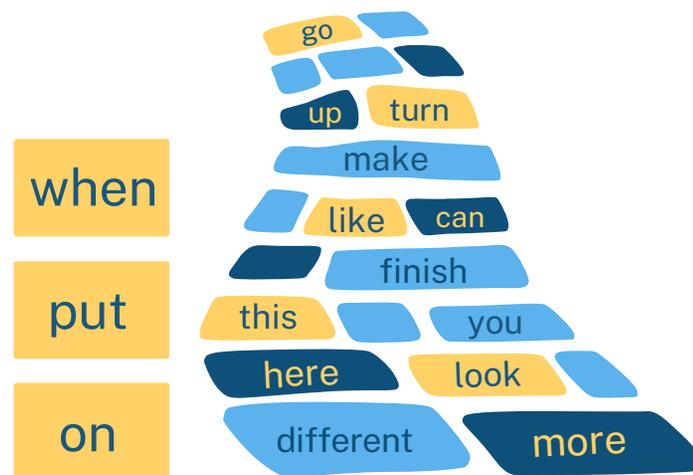
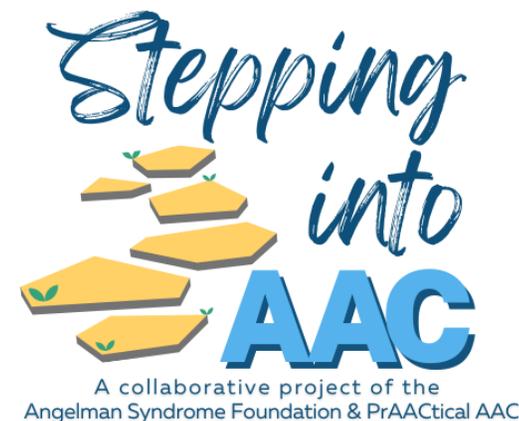
**SAY:** Talk about the things you PUT ON before you leave the house. Explain why we need to get ready. "WHEN it's cold, we PUT ON gloves."

#### Day 4

**FIND:** Find the best place to put your board when you're on the go. In a bag? Wearing it with a crossbody strap? Try it out and see where you can PUT it.

#### Day 5

**SHARE:** Taking AAC on the go means you could tell someone new about AAC. It could be as simple as "These symbols help them learn new ways to communicate."





## Inside this Issue

### BEYOND GOOD INTENTIONS

Learn when taking a step back is actually more helpful.

### QUESTION OF THE WEEK

"We've been at this AAC thing for awhile now. How do I know if I'm doing it right?"

### MORE TO EXPLORE

References, links to videos, resources

## DEVELOPING A VISION FOR SUCCESSFUL AAC USE

Throughout our journey, we take notes of small wins in our daily life, but we are always looking towards the big picture of successful AAC. As you've come to learn over the last 16 weeks, there are a multitude of factors that contribute to effective and successful AAC communication. This week, we'll discuss what successful AAC implementation looks like. Next week, we will take a look at what successful AAC looks like for our learners.



# BEYOND GOOD INTENTIONS



As a parent, it's only natural to want to help your child as much as you can and in any way that you can. We all have the tendency to do whatever we can to help our child shine. This may look like jumping in to help our child more than needed. While we have the best intentions, it may not be as helpful as we think it should be.

It may be helpful to examine your own practice in certain areas. One of the best ways to do this is to videotape your interactions and self-reflect on your interactions and implementation strategies. Take a look at the communication opportunities present during that interaction. Did you miss any opportunities for modeling? Did your child try to communicate something in the moment that you didn't realize when it was happening? Were you using aided language input as often as you could have? Remember that when modeling, you can start by modeling your child's current level plus one.

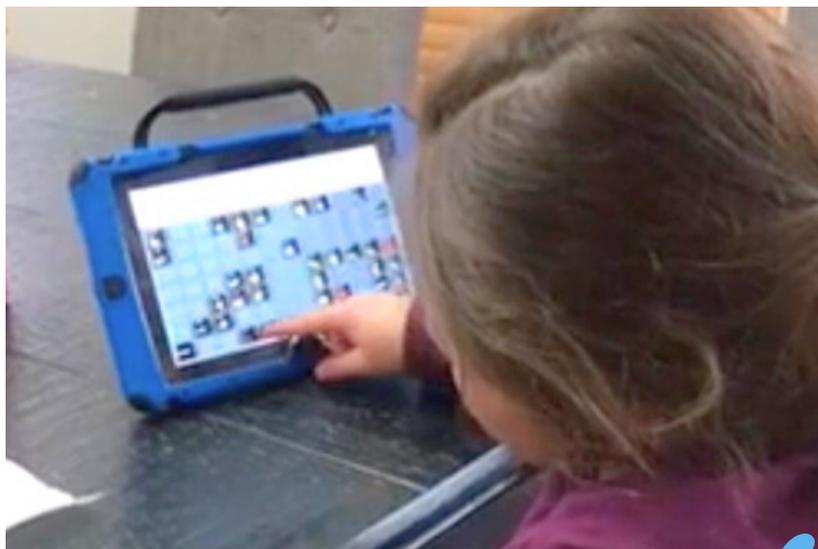
“  
*Believe in your kid  
and believe in  
yourself.*

*Rebecca, mother of Sophia, 16 years old, Class 1 deletion Angelman*

For example, if your child currently uses single words with their AAC system, you can model their current level (one word) plus one, meaning that you would model 2 words each time.

Self-reflect on your use of pause time. When you make a comment or ask a question, carefully count the number of seconds until your learner responds or before you jump in again. We have the tendency to jump in before our learner has the opportunity to try. Keeping a close eye on your pause time can be huge for your learner's progress.

*Continued on page 4.*



## DEVELOPING A VISION FOR SUCCESSFUL AAC USE

*continued*

While implementation is this week's focus, you cannot have implementation without access. Our learners need access to their AAC system at all times. AAC systems can be high-tech (like an iPad with AAC app or a dedicated device) or something without tech, such as a communication board or communication book. The National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities describes the right to have access to an AAC system at all times as a fundamental communication right. The general rule of thumb is that when you see your AAC learner, you should also see their AAC system. Oftentimes, parents are concerned about sending a high-tech device with their child to places like camp or the pool. The solution to this would be to have a communication board or communication book printed on sturdy paper or laminated paper as a backup to send instead.

Once your learner has consistent access to their device, we can focus on taking a look at implementation to ensure that what you and the AAC team are doing is effective. This would be a good time to take into account whether everyone is on the same page and using the same strategies across settings. Is everyone familiar with aided language input and using it on a consistent basis at the learner's level (e.g., if the learner is consistently using 1-word productions on their own, model 2 words)? Is the team focusing on engagement with the learner using low-demand, high-interest interactions?

You may not be getting consistent or intentional responses from your AAC learner yet, and that is okay! Encourage the AAC team to continue their implementation strategies. Some learners may be communicating independently and in a way that fits context and some may not. Each learner's journey is different, but as an AAC team, we need to stay the course and provide them with what they need to be successful. Our weekly action steps provide specific examples of things that you can do to continue your strategies. These would be great to share with the AAC team if anyone needs refreshing ideas!



## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

*"We've been at this AAC thing for awhile now. How do I know if I'm doing it right?"*

Earlier in this newsletter, we talked about going beyond good intentions. But, how do we know if our interaction style and implementation strategies are being used correctly? There are many ways that we can gauge our own success with these AAC strategies.

We've already touched on videotaping interactions for the purpose of self-checking and self-reflection. Let's take this a step further and consider the following concepts:

### **Gauging Interactions**

Are you having more positive interactions with your learner? If you are consistently using AAC strategies alongside low-demand, high-interest activities, you are more likely to see your child having more and more positive interactions. If your learner feels like they are being bombarded with questions and not being given enough time to respond each time their AAC system is used, interactions are less likely to be fun and positive.

### **Monitoring Consistent Use of Strategies**

We have found it helpful for parents to create a system where they can monitor their use of strategies to ensure consistency across the day. The system may look different for everyone, depending on your preference. For example, you could use a blank weekly calendar with target strategies listed under each day.

As you reflect on the day, you can check off each strategy that was used. Some parents prefer to make a list of target words used in addition to having a checklist. We've seen some really creative ways to do something like this.

Our suggestion is to find the way that works best for you! The most helpful system is one that you'll actually use.

*Continued on page 4.*

## MORE TO EXPLORE

### ARTICLE

- [PrAACtical Questions: "What Does a Robust AAC System Look Like?":](https://stepinaac.org/Robust_AAC) By now, you've had a good amount of experience and exposure to communication boards and/or books. But what does 'robust AAC' look like? Check out this blog post for a better idea! [https://stepinaac.org/Robust\\_AAC](https://stepinaac.org/Robust_AAC)



## BEYOND GOOD INTENTIONS

*continued*

Monitor your use of questions and directive language. While a few questions here and there can be helpful, we don't want it to monopolize the entirety of our interactions.

This can lead learners to "shut down" and not make as many communication attempts.

During your interactions, ensure that you are using descriptive language (e.g. "brown bear") rather than a bombardment of questions ("What is that? What color is it? What does it say?") or directive language ("Say brown bear", "Find it in your talker").

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*As small a step as it may take, we can do this.*

*Dawn, mother of David, age 26, Deletion + Angelman Syndrome*

Finally, consider the feedback that you're giving to your child. Are you encouraging their communication by validating their communicative attempts?

If your child communicated "yes" by nodding their head, be sure to acknowledge and accept that rather than say something like, "Okay, now tell me 'YES' with your talker!". Is your feedback specific?

While using kind words like "Good job!" may naturally roll off the tongue, we want to use more specific feedback.

At the end of the day, we want to ensure that we continue to monitor and self-reflect on our use of implementation strategies.

We want to ensure that we are not over-prompting our learners without giving them the opportunity to develop autonomy and independence.

## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

*"We've been at this AAC thing for awhile now. How do I know if I'm doing it right?"*

*continued*



### Rethinking the 'Dosage' of AAC Strategies

If, after some self-reflection and review of your weekly system, you find that you haven't been consistent with a certain strategy, it would be helpful to start rethinking the "dosage" of strategies. Maybe you're using strategies each day, but only for a few minutes rather than throughout the day.

### Enhancing Opportunities

If you can weave AAC use throughout daily routines and interactions that are already fun and engaging, your learner will be more likely to make communication attempts. If you're using strategies but you still don't see as much progress as you'd expect, consider the interactions themselves. The aim is for interactions to be low-pressure and not very demanding while at the same time, highly motivating. Let your child lead when it comes to these interactions. By keeping your detective lens focused on their communication through all modalities (e.g., body language, gestures, etc.), you will more than likely see many communication attempts that you can model words for.

### Being Honest With Yourself

If we're being honest, this may be the hardest part! We all have good intentions, but we need to be honest with ourselves regarding our consistency and use of these AAC strategies.

When it comes to AAC, many people tend to hone in on the learner's progress more so than the frequency, dosage, and quality of implementation strategies used by those people in their environment. There are so many ways for us to assess our own progress and make changes if we feel like something just isn't working right. By using the tips we've discussed, you will have a better idea if your strategies are working! Our biggest tip? Keep going! Do not be discouraged if you have to make tweaks to your plan.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND LINKS



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PrAACtical Questions: "What Does a Robust AAC System Look Like?"

**[https://stepinaac.org/Robust\\_AAC](https://stepinaac.org/Robust_AAC)**



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