



Week 1: Getting Started



AAcTion Steps

StepInAAC.org/A-Week1 (Online / PDF)

Choosing a Core Board Flowchart
Communication Board Templates



Sign Posts (videos)

StepInAAC.org/P-Week1 (YouTube playlist)

1-1: Give Language to Get Language

Video: StepInAAC.org/V1-1GiveToGet

Handout: StepInAAC.org/H1-1-GiveToGet

1-2: Communicative Functions

Video: StepInAAC.org/V1-2-CommunicationFunctions

Handout: StepInAAC.org/H1-2-CommunicationFunctions

1-3: Robust AAC: WHAT is it & WHY does it Matter

Video: StepInAAC.org/V1-3-RobustAAC-1

Handout: StepInAAC.org/H1-3-RobustAAC

1-4: Robust AAC: Decision-Making Considerations

Video: StepInAAC.org/V1-4-RobustAAC-2



Travelog (newsletter)

StepInAAC.org/N-Week1 (Online / PDF)

Topics:

- 100 Days of AAC
- Robust AAC



Question of the Week: Why not start with a choice board, PECS, or activity-based language display?



AAAction Steps Week 1

What to Expect

The Stepping Into AAC project is a toolkit of resources to help families and teams make informed decisions about AAC. Over the next 100 days, this project will introduce you to tools used to support communication. This project recognizes that families are critical members of each team supporting a learner. You will be provided with tools to try out and resources to share with others. After Stepping Into AAC, our hope is that you feel empowered and equipped to support decisions regarding your learner's communication.



Hands-on Activities

Day 1

LOOK at the format of each week. There are five days of activities or AAAction steps each week for 20 weeks. Take it one day at a time!

Day 2

FIND the Stepping Into AAC Word List. Take a look at the words we will focus on over the next 20 weeks. The board you choose should have these words.

Starting in Week 2, check this area for words to focus on each week.



Day 3

CHOOSE: It's time to decide which communication board you will use for these 20 weeks. Use the "Where do I start?" flowchart to help!

Day 4

READ: Spend five minutes & read each word on the communication board that you chose. Think about which words you say the most.

Day 5

SHARE a copy of this board with the school team or a family member. We've also provided a sample letter titled, "Letters to Teams." Adapt it and share!





Give Language to Get Language

A collaborative project of the Angelman Syndrome Foundation and PrAACtical AAC

Language Development is our guide when teaching AAC.

Access to AAC and ample opportunities to see it in action in meaningful experiences are needed to to expand AAC skills. Be patient. Language and AAC learning are a long game!



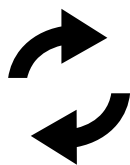
Step 1: Provide AAC

Access to AAC is necessary to learn about AAC and how to use it. There are no pre-requisites for AAC, and being able to manipulate and explore is essential for learning. Robust AAC provides learners opportunities to experiment with and learn about language in much the same way babbling and self-talk are a typical part of language development in young children.



Step 2: Model language on AAC

Speak **YOUR** words aloud and with AAC. Language input provided by communication partners is the basis for language learning, including when learning AAC. Seeing what it looks like to use language in meaningful ways is foundational for sparking interest in the power of communication, and developing competence.



Step 3: Keep modeling and providing AAC

Keep modeling and providing AAC. Pause, observe and have open-expectations about how your learner uses AAC. Language learning requires many repetitions, and can be messy. But like accumulating grains of sand each AAC experience contributes to AAC learning.



Links & Attributions

Give Language to Get Language



Stepping Into AAC homepage:
stepinaac.org/Welcome



Video 1-1:
stepinaac.org/V1-1GiveToGet



Handout:
stepinaac.org/H1-1-GiveToGet



Stepping Into AAC, Week 1 bundle:
stepinaac.org/WB1



Content for this Video & Handout informed and inspired by the work of :
NJC: Communication Bill of Rights

AAC Graphics created by:

Drawn to AAC: www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Drawn-To-Aac

AAC Symbols use by permission from **Lesson Pix** at Lessonpix.com



Communication Functions

A collaborative project of the Angelman Syndrome Foundation and PrAACtical AAC

Communication Functions are the REASONS we communicate.
They may also be called *communicative intents* or *communicative purposes*

What are the primary Communicative Functions?

- ✓ **Request:** Express wants & needs, advocate for assistance, & direct others
- ✓ **Refuse:** Express "stop, no, not, don't" or otherwise complain
- ✓ **Social Closeness:** Connect with others through greetings, chit-chat, humor, slang & more
- ✓ **Comment:** Share an opinion, use slang, notice & describe
- ✓ **Share Information:** Tell about, share news, describe, explain, problem-solve aloud
- ✓ **Ask Questions:** Authentic questions include wondering about things aloud, problem-solving aloud, and showing curiosity aloud.

How does using a variety of Communicative Functions make me a better AAC communication partner?



Fosters Connection & Interest by keeping conversations:

- ✓ natural & flexible
- ✓ interesting
- ✓ dynamic & worthwhile

Makes Modeling More Meaningful by:

- ✓ expanding what we talk about
- ✓ generating more opportunities to show how language works
- ✓ using a greater variety of vocabulary

Decreases Demands on the AAC learner by:

- ✓ giving a variety of ways to engage without a demand for the AAC learner to do so.
- ✓ keeping the conversation moving forward

Modeling a variety of communicative functions makes using AAC more interesting, fun, & sustainable!!



Links & Attributions

Communicative Functions



Stepping Into AAC homepage:

stepinaac.org/Welcome



Video 1-2:

stepinaac.org/V1-2-CommunicationFunctions



Handout:

stepinaac.org/H1-2-CommunicationFunctions



Stepping Into AAC, Week 1 bundle:

stepinaac.org/WB1



Content for this Video & Handout informed and inspired by the work of :

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Robust AAC: What it is & Why Start There!

A collaborative project of the Angelman Syndrome Foundation and PrAACtical AAC

Robust AAC refers to AAC tools that have the necessary features & functions to grow with AAC learners to support their long-term communication & literacy skill development.

Features

- ✓ Core Words
- ✓ Fringe Words
- ✓ Social Messages
- ✓ Organized & Customizable
- ✓ Grammar Forms
- ✓ Prestored Message Options
- ✓ Alphabet

Functions

- ✓ Messages for AAC Learners
- ✓ Messages for Communication Partners
- ✓ Words to Express a Variety of Communicative Functions
- ✓ Messages for Communication Repair

Why

- ★ Anticipating the words another will need is a humbling & daunting task. Robust AAC removes the burden by providing a variety of words.

Robust

- ★ AAC learning is hard work, & it takes time. Starting with Robust AAC maximizes time & effort by limiting re-learning of ever-changing AAC, for learners and their communication partners.

AAC

- ★ Providing Robust AAC gives learners the opportunity to explore & surprise us with what they say!! ...similar to typical language development.

Matters

- ★ The Alphabet is needed because no AAC has "all the words". Regardless of a learner's current literacy skills, access to the alphabet is needed for alphabet exploration & literacy skill development.



Links & Attributions

Robust AAC: WHAT it is and WHY Start There?



Stepping Into AAC homepage:
stepinaac.org/Welcome



Video 1-3:
stepinaac.org/V1-3-RobustAAC-1



Handout:
stepinaac.org/H1-3-RobustAAC



Stepping Into AAC, Week 1 bundle:
stepinaac.org/WB1



Content for this Video & Handout informed and inspired by the work of :
Carole Zangari, Jane Farrall, Erin Sheldon



Inside this Issue

ROBUST LANGUAGE

Robust language is the goal. But does this really make sense for those who are just getting started?

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

"Why not start with a choice board, PECS, or activity-based displays?"

MORE TO EXPLORE

References, links to videos, resources

100 DAYS OF AAC

An Overview of Stepping Into AAC

Welcome to the first issue of *Stepping Into AAC*, a project designed to support the communication learning of individuals with significant communication challenges. *Stepping into AAC* is a guided journey that can help teams begin to use AAC with individuals who need high levels of support to develop their language and communication skills. It is a joint effort of the [Angelman Syndrome Foundation](#) and [PrAACtical AAC](#).





ROBUST LANGUAGE

Why prioritize it for Beginning Communicators?

In the early days of supporting children with significant communication challenges, we generally provided them with communication aids that had a few dozen words for their favorite foods, shows, and toys along with things like 'sick' and 'potty.' Those words allowed them to ask for things they wanted but didn't help much with some of the other things they wanted to express.

The truth is, they had much more to say. But the words we had given them didn't empower them to share their thoughts.

Their parents and teachers weren't satisfied with this approach either. There were too many situations when this limited set of words just didn't cut it.

“

I don't ever want to put a cap on Maya.

”

Deborah, mom of Maya, age 2, Deletion + Angelman Syndrome

"When he doesn't feel well, I want Josiah to be able to tell me what's wrong." "We want Marisol to do Show & Tell just like her friends." "Xavier was so proud of himself for earning 3 stars at PT today!" "It broke my heart when Pop-Pop didn't know what he was trying to say." "He loves story time, but he can't really participate the way other kids do."

Continued on page 4.

100 DAYS OF AAC

continued

You will be guided through 100 days of AACtion over 20 weeks. At the end of that time, you will be using a starter AAC system throughout the day and be ready to be an informed participant as your child's therapy or educational team conducts a comprehensive AAC evaluation to select an appropriate AAC device or app. Already have an AAC device but not yet using it throughout the day? *Stepping Into AAC* will help you move toward integrating it into everyday life.

What can we expect? Each week there will be new content created by AAC experts and vetted by families who are using AAC with their children. Here's what to look for.

AACtion Steps: Let's learn by doing! Work through 5 days of easy hands-on activities that are designed to get parents using their AAC tool in different ways.

Signposts: Learn more about AAC concepts and strategies for success. View brief videos of parents reflecting on their AAC experiences and professionals explaining ways to build a strong foundation of AAC use. Our handy companion guides can be used in planning your next steps or reminders of each week's key concepts.

Travelogue: Pack your bags with weekly newsletters (like this one) that deepen your understanding of AAC. These are designed to be shared with your child's teachers and therapists so that they can follow along in this journey.

You can see a list of topics that we'll cover in the AAC Roadmap later in this issue.





VIDEO

- ## ARTICLES

- LINKS ON PAGE 8**



Continued on page 4.

ROBUST LANGUAGE

Why prioritize it for Beginning Communicators? (continued)

To communicate effectively in those types of situations, learners need access to a variety of words. They need pronouns, like 'I/me' and 'it.' They need verbs like 'get,' 'stop,' and 'do.' They need words that describe things (e.g., 'some,' 'good'), words that allow them to get information (e.g., 'what?' 'when?'), and so much more.

“

From the beginning you can see the limitations [of PECS].

Deborah, mom of Maya, age 2, Deletion + Angelman Syndrome

Will they learn those words right away? Of course not. No child does. Babies hear language for a year or more before they even start to talk. Language learning takes time. It takes support. And it takes practice.

In the next 20 weeks, you'll learn how to help children with intellectual disabilities and physical limitations develop a foundation for language learning.

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

"Why not start with a choice board, PECS, or activity-based displays?" (continued)



PECS (continued)

Secondly, there are dozens of removable pictures that get lost, dirty, and destroyed over time. Also, the skills learned through PECS (pulling off and exchanging symbols) doesn't help to develop the pointing skills used in most other AAC tools. And once the pictures have been used to express a word or sentence, someone has to put each one back on in its proper location so that it can be used again. Finally, the initial focus on using AAC to ask for things doesn't align with the broad array of purposes that are inherent in natural language development.

Activity-based Communication Boards (ABCDs): These are communication boards with vocabulary centered around a single topic. The ABCD for snack time might have words like want, eat, drink, pretzels, crackers, grapes, fruit gummies, more, yummy, yucky, and all done. It's nice to have different kinds of words, but there are two big problems with this approach. First, this assumes that all we talk about during snack time is what we want to eat or drink and that's just not the case. In most societies, eating is a highly social experience where we communicate to share about our day, ask and answer questions, joke around, complain, make plans, etc. And what happens when the snack is over? The ABCD for snack is put away, and we get out the one for Play Doh, going to the park, or whatever we're doing next. The words we were just using have now disappeared! So if I get thirsty at the park, I no longer have access to words that allow me to ask for a drink. And, if I see some junk food wrappers that were dropped, I can't alert you to the 'fruit gummies' on the ground or tell you that Josie took my fruit gummies when Ms. Mayersohn wasn't looking. When words are used for part of the day and then become inaccessible, we make language learning harder. Plus, it's confusing and frustrating.

Language is complex and messy. It may seem simpler to use a more limited approach to AAC, but there are significant trade-offs when we do.





STEPPING INTO AAC ROADMAP

Every journey needs a map. This one starts with parents selecting a starter communication board to use with their children. We're providing you with options for communications boards that align with popular AAC apps and guidance on how to select one to meet your child's needs. You'll use this throughout the 20-week program as you develop fundamental knowledge and skills to support your child. Those whose children already have a robust AAC device/app will learn to use it to facilitate their children's communication and language development.

Over the course of the program, parents will gain experience with using a growing number of the most frequently used words. You will be guided through activities focusing on different high-frequency words each week, and use those for several different communicative purposes. Along the way, you'll be developing your knowledge of AAC concepts and best practices.

The program includes weekly content to be shared with the child's educational/therapeutic team. By the end of the 20 weeks, parents should be prepared to engage with their local school and therapy teams to pursue a comprehensive AAC assessment leading to the selection of an AAC device or app that meets their child's unique needs.



WEEK 1: Getting Started - Learn what to expect from this program & select a communication board from our suggested options. You'll use this throughout the 20-week journey.

WEEKS 2-5: AAC Practices for a Solid Start - Learn key concepts and supportive strategies and begin putting them into practice.

WEEKS 6-8: Customizing the Starter Communication Board for Your Child - Add high-interest vocabulary and make adjustments for children with vision, motor, and attention challenges.

WEEKS 9-10: AAC in Daily Routines - Integrate AAC into everyday activities and routines.

WEEKS 11-12: AAC at Play - Ramp up your child's leisure time by infusing AAC.

WEEKS 13-14: Reading with AAC - See how interactive storybook reading can support AAC learning.

WEEKS 15-16: AAC Outside - Take AAC into the great outdoors as you play, exercise, and do outside chores.

WEEKS 17-18: AAC on the Go - Take AAC on the road and begin using your communication board and support strategies in the community.

WEEK 19: AAC Outside the Family - Build a team that can support the next leg of your AAC adventure.

WEEK 20: Looking Back to Move Forward - Look how far you've come! Considerations for the next steps in your AAC journey.



A LOOK AT OUR COMMUNICATION BOARD OPTIONS

A key part of the Stepping Into AAC journey is using core vocabulary on a communication board (or an AAC device/app if you have one). This week you will be choosing one of these to work with.

From AssistiveWare

Aligns with Proloquo2Go Crescendo (top)
& Proloquo (bottom)



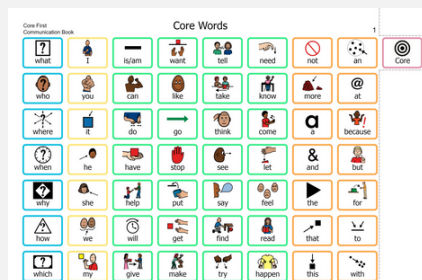
From PRC-Salttillo

Aligns with TouchChat with WordPower 60 Basic
(left) & LAMP Words for Life (right)



From Tobii-Dynavox

Aligns with TD Snap



From Project Core

Does not align with a commercially available AAC device/app but chosen for its ability to support children with significant vision or motor limitations



“WHY ISN’T THERE A BOARD THAT ALIGNS WITH THE XYZ DEVICE/APP?”

There are dozens of AAC devices and apps with various capabilities and configurations. We selected those that are most popular in North America, provide easy access to most of the words we target in the Stepping Into AAC journey, and have a strong foundation for language development. However, you can certainly benefit from the information and resources in this program even if you are using a different AAC device or app as long as it has most of the words addressed in this program.



Choosing a Communication Board

Where do I start?

Does my learner already have a communication board or AAC device?

YES

Does this communication board or device have all or most words included in this project?

YES

Great! Start with that.

UNSURE

Check the list of words that are used in this project. If this board or device has most of these words, you can start with what you have.

NO

Consider using a board provided in this project that best matches your current system. Having the right words is key to this journey.

Word list for the project
stepinaac.org/WordList

NO

Does your school or clinic have a communication board or device that they use most often?

YES

Check the project word list. If this board has most of these words, you can start with what you have. If not, choose one of the project boards.

UNSURE

Ask them what communication board is used in the classroom or clinic. Check the project word list to be sure it includes most of these words.

NO

Look at the boards provided. Choose the one that seems to be the best fit. They're all great!

If their communication board doesn't have most of the words from this project...

The communication boards provided are all excellent starting points. Select one and know that you will learn about ways to support your learner. You can always adjust during this journey with AAC.

Now that you've decided on a communication board or device, let's get started!



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND LINKS



Stepping into AAC is grateful to the following companies for the use of their core boards:
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How I Do It: AUTISM AND AAC: FIVE THINGS I

WISH I HAD KNOWN by Deanne Shoyer

https://stepinaac.org/ASD_AAC



Linguistically-Robust AAC Systems

<https://stepinaac.org/RobustAAC>



What is core and fringe vocabulary?

https://stepinaac.org/Core_Fringe_Vocab



**Print all materials
from week 1 here:
[STEPINAAC.ORG/WB1](https://stepinaac.org/WB1)**