



Getting Peers Involved

“Children who have difficulty communicating are at risk for social isolation because communication is so essential for creating bonds between friends through laughing, arguing, complaining and telling stories.” (Therrien, Light and Pope, 2016)

For many students who use AAC, the majority of their interactions at school are with adults. However, peers can become a powerful part of a student’s school life when they are supported to understand and get involved with students using AAC. For many students who use AAC it’s much more motivating to learn from their friends. For some it can really increase the ‘cool’ factor if their friends have a go using their AAC system.

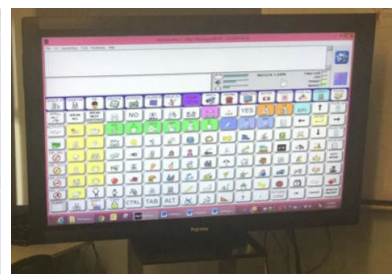
The most suitable strategies and activities will depend on the type of school setting and the students’ age and abilities, but here are a few ideas to start you off. Most importantly, try to keep it fun; communication can be messy but it’s about connecting and building relationships.

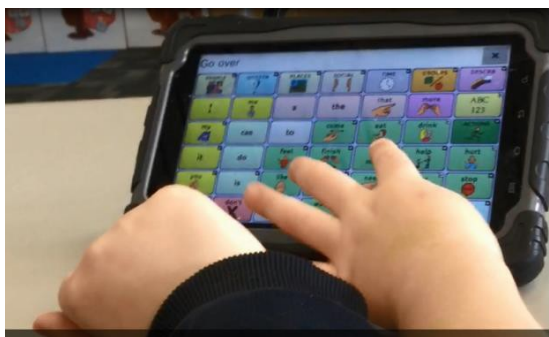
Peer education session – Many peers are curious about and interested in the AAC system. This lesson could involve a chat about communication, help peers see the AAC system as their friend’s voice, and have a go using an AAC system themselves. The more they understand and feel involved, the more they tend to engage with and interact with the student using AAC. If your student has a Speech Pathologist they may be able to help with this session.



What systems can peers use to get involved and learn the AAC system?

Some AAC users are happy for their peers to take a turn using their device, some devices have free editing software which can be used on the smart board, some schools have duplicate copies of the app on school iPads. However it can also work just as well to print out some key pages of the AAC system for peers to practice with. What would make most sense for your class?





Group work and partner work

Working in a small group or with a partner creates natural opportunities to communicate with peers. Make something together, choose who will do what, share a book together, share ideas and opinions.

Consider seating positions in class

Some interested peers can be great desk buddies, modelling language and supporting their friend with their AAC system.

Interviews and surveys

These can be a great way to create opportunities to interact with a wider range of peers in the class or around the school. *What pets do people have? Which football team do people support?*

Sharing news

This might be a formal news time or just something students can share when they come into class in the morning. News can be a great way to start a chat and discover shared interests and experiences.



Giving directions in group games

Using 'go' and 'stop' to direct musical statues, using action words in an adapted Simon Says or directing a sports warm up, using numbers in 'what's the time Mr Wolf'. Giving directions is a great way to discover the power of communication and can be great fun!

Chat time

When could you build in time to just have an unstructured chat? Talk about favourite topics and say what you think. Conversation is real communication.

Joke time

Can you spend a couple of minutes sharing some jokes at the end of the day? Many devices have some jokes pre-programmed ready to go.



Our aim is to create a supportive classroom community and make AAC part of the language of the classroom.

References

Therrien, M., Light, J. & Pope, L. (2016). Systematic review of the effects of interventions to promote peer interactions for children who use aided AAC, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 32(2), 81-93.