

HOW TO TALK TO PATIENTS WHO USE AAC

Supporting Communication for every patient

1. Speak Directly to the Patient

- Always address the patient first- not the caregiver or staff.
- Make eye contact and use a calm, respectful tone.
- Start with a simple “Hi, how are you today?”, even if you’re not sure if they’ll answer.

2. Be Patient and Give Wait Time

- May AAC users need extra time to find and create a message.
- Try counting to 10 silently before speaking again.
- Avoid finishing their sentences or guessing too quickly.

3. Ask Open-Ended Questions & Check for Understanding

- Instead of “Does it hurt?” ask “Can you tell me what’s bothering you?”
- Offer choices when needed: “Is it your stomach or your head?”
- If you’re unsure, ask them to show or tell you in a different way

4. Respond to All Forms of Communication

- Honor communication through AAC devices, gestures, body language, vocalizations, etc.
- Reinforce any attempt to communicate: “Thanks for telling me that!”

5. Ask What Works Best

- You can say: “How do you like to communicate?” or “What helps you during appointments?”
- If they use an AAC system, ask “Can you show me how it works?”