

AAC Strategies by Communication Phase

Supportive Techniques for Young Children Learning to Communicate

Match your strategies to the child's current communication phase, and revisit often—development is not always linear. Use this guide to support caregiver coaching, goal writing, and intervention planning.

Phase 2: Intentional, Pre-Symbolic Communication

What to Look For:

Child uses gestures, actions, or vocalizations on purpose (e.g., reaching, pointing, waving) to communicate.

Key AAC Strategies:

- **Continue Observing and Responding:**
Recognize and reinforce early gestures and purposeful actions as communication.
- **Reinforce Routines and Turn-Taking:**
Engage in repeated back-and-forth activities, such as songs or passing toys, to encourage interaction.
- **Expand Receptive Language:**
Incorporate verbs, nouns, and descriptive words in daily routines ("push ball," "yummy banana")
- **Model Gestures and Device Use:**
Pair gestures or signs with speech-generating devices or communication buttons during play and routines.
- **Encourage Object Exploration and Choice-Making:**
Offer two real items and honor the child's choice (e.g. reach, look, or touch).
- **Use Visual Supports with Objects:**
Pair pictures with familiar toys or actions to build symbolic understanding.

Pro Tip: It's okay if the child's gestures or vocalizations aren't perfect. The key is that they are using them intentionally to convey a message. Celebrate any attempt to communicate.