

# AAC Strategies by Communication Phase

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## 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 3: Intentional, Symbolic Communication

#### What to Look For:

Children understand and begin using symbols, like words, pictures, signs, or device buttons, to express themselves.

#### Key AAC Strategies:

- **Refine Observing and Responding:**  
Notice and respond to early combinations of symbols, gestures, or speech consistently.
- **Support Independent Turn-Taking:**  
Allow "wait" time for the child to use their AAC device, scroll, or activate buttons.
- **Broaden Receptive Language:**  
Use visuals and signs along with spoken directions (e.g., "get your shoes," "wash hands").
- **Continue Modeling Gestures and Device Use:**  
Model symbol use by pointing to device icons or signing as you talk.
- **Encourage Device Exploration:**  
Let the child freely explore their AAC system, even if their use isn't always purposeful.
- **Increase Choices and Build Sentences:**  
Move from single icons to short two- or three-word phrases (e.g., "I want snack").
- **Generalize Across Settings:**  
Use AAC across routines (e.g. playtime, meal time, transitions) and with various communication partners.

**Pro Tip:** Embrace "aided language stimulation." Consistently model the use of the child's AAC method by speaking, pointing to, or selecting symbols or words on the child's device. This immerses the child in language and shows the child how symbols and words are used to express thoughts and ideas.