

Top tips for modelling Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Tools

What is modelling?

Modelling is when adults demonstrate how to use words, signs, or symbols *in context*, without expecting the CYP (Child or Young Person) to copy or respond immediately.

For example: the adult may see the CYP pointing to a toy, which is acknowledged by the adult saying and signing “You want the car!”

This helps CYP:

- Learn new vocabulary
- Understand how to combine words
- See how to use communication tools

CYP need to *see and hear* language used many times before they can use it themselves.

Why model or use ALS?

These strategies are two of the very best ways to support your CYP with their communication tool. Your CYP needs to see you modelling how to use their communication tool before they are expected to use it.

What is Aided Language Stimulation?

Aided Language Stimulation (ALS) means **pointing to symbols or visuals while you speak**.

It's one of the most powerful ways to help CYP understand and begin to use **symbol-supported communication systems** like communication boards or books.

For example:

- Say: “Let’s go outside”
- While pointing to the symbols for “go” and “outside” on the CYP’s board or visual strip.

This shows CYP how their communication tools work, and builds their confidence to use them.

We typically use the CYP’s **own AAC system** to model, whether it’s a book, board, app, or device.

How often and how long should we model?

As much as possible, little and often works well. Don’t be discouraged if your CYP isn’t looking or doesn’t use it right away, exposure over time is key.

‘If AAC is only modelled and used during snack-time every day for 15 minutes, it will take a child **80 years** to reach the language level of a 3 year old.’ Jane Korsten

What if the modelling doesn’t go to plan?

Mistakes are a learning opportunity. It shows your CYP that it’s okay to make a mistake and shows them how they can repair this. If you can’t find the word you are thinking of maybe you could find an alternative word or describe it.



How do we model/use ALS?

1. Use your CYP's communication tool in **everyday** situations. This will help your child to see that talking happens **everywhere** and at any time.
2. Point to or select single words/symbols and short phrases to talk about what your CYP is hearing, seeing, doing and feeling.
3. Remember to also comment on what you, as the communication partner, are experiencing or thinking using their communication tool.
4. Harness opportunities that are fun and engaging for your CYP and model the AAC tools alongside.
5. Use lots of repetition as you comment about ongoing events.
6. Take your time and insert lots of **pauses** into the conversation. This will give your CYP time to process this information and an opportunity to respond.
7. When your CYP communicates something with a single word/symbol, you can expand this by repeating the message back with another word.
8. Make sure the AAC tools are easily accessible.

Useful videos

KCHFT Children's Therapies Website: The Pod	www.kentcht.nhs.uk/childrens-therapies-the-pod/speech-and-language-therapy/augmentative-and-alternative-communication-aac/ - Starting out with signs and symbols - 10 top tips for supporting children with communication aids	
YouTube	https://youtu.be/mXj1Btf0qFw?feature=shared	
YouTube	https://youtu.be/fIFNMky22-U?feature=shared	