

## COMMUNICATION BOARDS



Communication between someone who's nonverbal and someone who uses spoken language can be difficult. Communication boards can help reduce frustration by providing simple, recognizable images and symbols to help us understand one another. They can be used to:

- express a simple request
- ask questions
- offer choices
- display a schedule or routine

A communication board can be made of photos, symbols, or illustrations to help people with language delays express their wants and needs. The user can gesture, point to, or blink at images to communicate with others. Communication boards are just one type of augmentative or alternative communication (AAC) device. They can be simple, handmade boards or computerized programs.

It is estimated that around 3.5 million people in the United States need assistance communicating because of speech and language disabilities. These communication boards are used by both children and adults with a variety of medical diagnoses – including autism spectrum disorder, apraxia of speech, traumatic brain injuries, learning delays or disabilities, early childhood language delays and disorders, etc.

For children, the use of a communication board or device can be incorporated into their IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan), or IEP (Individualized Education Program) or a 504 plan for the school system. Everyone the child interacts with during the day – including parents, siblings, teachers, therapists, and peers can all encourage and work on communication.

## **BASIC COMMUNICATION BOARDS**

A communication board doesn't have to be a board at all. It can be:

- a piece of paper with symbols drawn on it
- a notebook with images from magazines in it
- photos of people, items, and routines from the child's home or school
- visuals with graphic symbols paired with words

The primary advantage of basic, low-tech communication boards is that they're comparatively inexpensive and can be made from a wide range of materials.

## **AUGMENTATIVE OR ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC) DEVICES**

These devices may be electronic or digital. Some are computer-based, and some are apps that can be used on a smartphone or tablet. Some devices, called speech-generating devices, allow a user to project a synthesized or digital voice. These devices unite several different communication methods into a single app or program. Electronic or digital AAC devices can be costly and can range from \$100 up to \$2,500+. Some insurance companies may help with the cost of AAC devices.

## **TIPS FOR USING A COMMUNICATION BOARD**

- Allow the user to choose how to communicate as much as possible.
- Try different types of graphics. Some people will respond to symbols, while others may respond better to photographs of real objects and people.
- Use daily activities as teachable moments and integrate the communication board into your daily routines.
- When using the device with a child, blend it into play time so it's associated with fun.
- Tailor the vocabulary to the skill level of the child.

Many people may benefit from communication boards and they can be used to help facilitate communication for those with limited expressive language abilities. They also can help develop language skills, and increase social interactions. If you're interested in learning more about Communication Boards and AAC Devices, please talk with your child's speech-language pathologist. Here are a few resources to get you started:

[LessonPix](#)

[Boardmaker](#)

[AAC in Routines](#)

[Free Communication Boards](#)