

AAC IS NOT A LAST RESORT

A communication system is not a reward for proving you deserve one. “They need to talk first” is a prerequisite — and the speech-language profession’s own body says prerequisites are the error, not the safeguard.

A CHILD DOES NOT EARN THE RIGHT TO SPEAK BY SPEAKING.

EVERYBODY COMMUNICATES · THE QUESTION IS WHO OPENED A CHANNEL

“Numerous studies have demonstrated that the use of AAC does not interfere with speech development and actually has been shown to support such development.”

NATIONAL JOINT COMMITTEE FOR THE COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF PERSONS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES · ASHA

Access is a written right. Read its three qualifiers, because each one answers a way the right gets quietly withdrawn.

INDIVIDUALIZED

Chosen for this child — not whatever the district already owns a licence for, and not the system that happened to be in the cupboard.

WORKING

Charged, repaired, and programmed with the words this child actually wants. A broken system is a withdrawn one.

AT ALL TIMES

Home, playground, bus, assembly, lunch. Not only in therapy, not only at school, not once the aide has a free hand.

SAID IN THE ROOM — AND WHAT IT ACTUALLY IS

- ✓ “Let’s see how speech develops first.” — **a prerequisite**. The NJC says criteria applied in advance preclude consideration of individual needs.
- ✓ “They’re not ready for a device.” — **readiness is an a priori criterion**. So is a diagnosis. So is an age.
- ✓ “We don’t want to discourage them from talking.” — **AAC does not interfere with speech**. The profession’s own position is that it supports it.
- ✓ “We tried it and it didn’t work.” — **ask who was modelling it**, how often, and for how long. If nobody was, it was not tried.

PREREQUISITES ARE THE ERROR

"Not ready", "hasn't shown intent", "not a candidate yet" are all the same move. The NJC names it:

- "Eligibility determinations based on **a priori criteria** violate recommended practice principles by precluding consideration of individual needs."
- A prerequisite is an a priori criterion. **So is a diagnosis, a cognitive score, and an age.**
- "Communication is essential across the lifespan, thus it is **inappropriate to restrict access** ... on the basis of chronological age." That closes both doors — too young, and too late.

ASK FOR THIS, IN THE ROOM

- ✓ what the prerequisite is, and **where it is written**
- ✓ a robust system, not a starter one — can they say *no*?
- ✓ who is modelling it, how often, and for how long
- ✓ that it goes **everywhere the child goes**
- ✓ what happens the day it breaks
- ✓ that speech and AAC be supported, **not traded**

A DEVICE IS NOT ENOUGH

The most common way AAC fails is not refusal. It is a device handed over with nobody using it.

- **Nobody learns a language they have never seen anyone speak.** A child given a talker where every adult communicates by mouth is learning a language in isolation.
- A systematic review of partner modelling found gains in **pragmatics, semantics, syntax and morphology** — Sennott, Light & McNaughton, 2016.
- So "we tried AAC and it didn't work" is usually a description of **the adults**.

The message existed. The channel was closed, and nobody opened another one.

PATTERN 30 · COMMUNICATION BANDWIDTH · STIMPUNKS FOUNDATION

Adapted from the *AAC Is Not a Last Resort* Why Sheet at stimpunks.org/why/aac, which carries the full detail and every source. The quoted findings and the phrase **a priori criteria** come from the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities, *Access to Communication Services and Supports: Concerns Regarding the Application of Restrictive "Eligibility" Policies* (ASHA). The three qualifiers — **individualized, working, at all times** — are quoted from the *Communication Bill of Rights, 3rd edition, NJC 2024*, which replaced the 2016 version still widely circulated. The modelling review is Sennott, Light & McNaughton, *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 2016. *Facilitated Communication and Spelling to Communicate are deliberately not on this sheet: the argument does not need contested ground.*