

ABOUT COMPLEX COMMUNICATION NEEDS (CCN)



Someone with complex communication needs (CCN) has difficulties and challenges with their daily interactions due to limited use and understanding of speech.

Children with complex communication needs can be at a disadvantage with their language development.

The average 18-month-old has been exposed to 4,380 hours of oral language at a rate of 8 hours per day from birth. A child who has a communication system and receives speech-language therapy 2 times per week for 20 to 30 minute sessions will reach this same amount of language exposure in 84 years (Korsten 2001).

This means that the team around the learner must model words using the learner's communication mode or system to develop language.



**Government
of South Australia**

Department for Education

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) includes all the ways someone can communicate without using spoken language. It could involve the use of gesture, sign language, pictures, technology, or a combination of these.

Learners with complex communication needs might be people who do not use, or have difficulty understanding, spoken language.

- developmental disabilities and genetic conditions
- acquired disorders such as dysarthria, stroke and acquired brain injury
- progressive disorders like motor neurone disease
- cognitive-communication disorders such as aphasia.

Access to AAC provides language input and output that allows learners to participate in life and all areas of learning.

Communication partners

There will be people who know the learners well and are confident about responding to their communication attempts, and others who are not. They are referred to as familiar and unfamiliar communication partners. If you are an unfamiliar communication partner, talk to a familiar partner or the speech pathologist about ways to help you develop confidence when interacting with the learner.

Therapy team

The learner should have a speech pathologist supporting them. If so, then a collaborative approach with them is highly recommended. It is also important to make sure that the parent/carer and the learner are consulted in the process and contribute to decision-making.

Strengths of learners with complex communication needs

- Augmentative and alternative communication enables them to express their personality and use language like their peers.
- They may have greater receptive understanding compared to what they can express. Do not assume that they do not understand what is said.
- Learners who have complex communication needs convey their personality in many ways, for example through eye gaze, vocalisations, facial expression and gesture.
- They develop relationships with peers and have unique interests.

COMPLEX COMMUNICATIONS NEEDS ADJUSTMENTS



EXAMPLES OF ADJUSTMENTS



Communicating with the learner

When communicating with the learner, it's important to use their systems and strategies. The speech pathologist, family or familiar educator can help with this. Some general strategies you can use include:

- using their system to model language
- using a range of communication functions, for example making comments, jokes, requests
- providing wait time when the learner is responding.



Educating the learner

When educating the learner, communication opportunities need to occur throughout the whole school day.

You will need to plan and ensure that learning is accessible to meet their needs. This may include:

- providing high quality literacy instruction
- ensuring access to language to participate in curriculum
- using assistive technology where required
- using informal and formal assessment to measure progress.



Supporting the learner with their social network

As a familiar communication partner you need to help their unfamiliar communication partners build their understanding by:

- helping learners use AAC with their peers
- providing scaffolding and support to unfamiliar educators
- making sure that they have opportunities to communicate with many people across the school day just like their peers.

