

# Getting Started with AAC and Literacy

*“Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world.”*

National Literacy Trust<sup>1</sup>



*“No student is too anything to be able to read and write.”*

David Yoder, ISAAC 2000<sup>2</sup>

The journey to literacy might look different for someone who uses AAC when compared to verbal peers. It is important to give everyone access to purposeful literacy teaching, irrespective of the challenges they may face.

## Why does it matter?

Spelling opens up a world of possibility – you can say whatever you want to say! In contrast, people who use symbols are limited by what is put into their AAC resource by other people. By teaching someone to spell, we are giving them autonomy to spontaneously create and communicate their own messages. Irrespective of where they are on their journey, access to literacy can support their communication and unlock potential.

It's important to immerse all people in a rich literacy environment, giving them access to books and the alphabet.

## What does early literacy look like?

There are a few things to look out for before moving on to formal literacy teaching.

Does the person:

- Know most of the letters most of the time?
- Engage actively during shared reading?
- Have a means to communicate and interact?
- Understand that writing involves letters and words? <sup>3</sup>

If not, keep reading to find out some ideas to get you started with early literacy, also known as emergent literacy.

# How to begin early literacy today...

## Self-Directed Reading

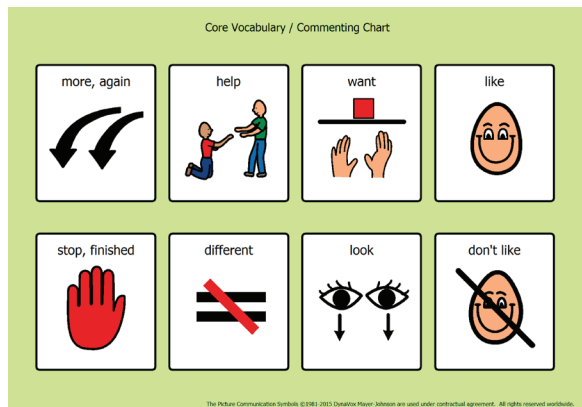
During self-directed reading, people experience a wide variety of text types – including audiobooks and eBooks - which they have chosen themselves based on their preferences and interests.

Give people access to print, without symbols – words are symbols in themselves.

## Shared Reading

Shared reading refers to the interaction between a beginner and an experienced reader when reading and talking about books together.

Although symbols aren't helpful for self-directed reading, they can be powerful when used alongside a book to support communication.



Point to symbols for the words you are saying to support your spoken messages. Focus on the following when reading:

- Make a comment 'Wow, LOOK a lion!'
- Ask for participation: 'I wonder if you LIKE the lion?'
- Respond and add more 'You're frowning, I think you DON'T LIKE the lion!'

Shared reading gives beginner readers opportunities for communication and interaction.

## Writing

Having the opportunity to write or "scribble" helps develop the concept that letters and words have meaning. This may be difficult for people who are unable to hold a traditional pencil. Adaptations can be made to give the same experiences as their peers, including the use of alternative pencils. <sup>4</sup>

## Letters and Sounds

Teach the skills needed to identify letters and sounds to develop the building blocks of learning to read and write. This could involve:

- Pointing out letters in the environment. Start with motivating letters like those found in a person's name.
- Make up fun rhymes or songs emphasizing certain sounds.
- Count the syllables in words by clapping along to each one.



For more information and links to supporting the literacy development of people who use AAC please follow the QR code or go to [www.acecentre.org.uk/resources/aac-and-literacy](http://www.acecentre.org.uk/resources/aac-and-literacy)

1 National Literacy Trust, <https://literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/>

2 David Yoder, DJI AbleNet Literacy Lecture ISAAC 2000

3 Erickson, K and Koppenhaver D (2020) Comprehensive Literacy for All, pg201 Brookes Publishing.

4 Center for Literacy & Disability Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill <https://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/alternative-pencils/>