Communication apps and your patient’s data

If you are a therapist requesting a communication app then you need to know how information entered into AAC apps may be stored and used, and the potential third-party involvement in this process. This is because it is your responsibility to inform your patients, in a way that they can understand, and make them aware of any associated risks.

Please note that KM CAT is not responsible for safeguarding information entered into communication aids (AAC apps or otherwise). If your patient chooses to store information that they wish to keep confidential on their communication aid, they do so entirely at their own risk.

The following is guidance on what you may need to consider in relation to communication apps and your patient’s data, we also recommend that you read the relevant company’s data protection and privacy policy:

# Communication apps requiring accounts

Some communication apps require an account to be set up, for example ‘Grid for iPad’ and ‘Predictable’. There may be an option to have an online or offline account:

An **offline account** normally stores information on the device only (name and email address may be stored by the company). If the device is erased, or your patient logs out of the offline account, there is no backup.

An **online account** will back up settings and saved phrases online. If the device is erased, or your patient logs out of their account, there is a backup. However, it does mean that your patient may be giving their data to the company. How this data is stored and used will be different for each app and it is advised that you read the relevant company’s Data Protection and Privacy Policy.

Most companies provide assurance that information will be handled appropriately, and stored securely, but as this is stored online, there is a risk that confidential information may be accessible to a third-party.

# Communication apps not requiring accounts

Some apps do not require an online account to function, for example ‘Speech Assistant’ and ‘GoTalk NOW’. However, they may have optional backup features that require accounts with third-party online (cloud) storage services. It is important to understand how these third-parties store data (see below).

# Back-ups from Communication apps

Most communication apps will allow the back-up of vocabulary. This is useful if the device is lost or erased, as there is a backup of saved phrases and settings. However, it is important to understand how the information is backed-up i.e. how it is transported and stored.

Most apps offer cloud storage. Whilst all cloud storage services have privacy policies that state that they will handle data securely, there may be a risk that any confidential information that is stored may be accessible to a third- party.

Some apps offer the option of using AirDrop or mail to send files to another device, for example ‘Speech Assistant’ or ‘GoTalk NOW’; it is important to ensure the data is sent to the right person or device if using these options.

# Third-party online data-storage services

To store data using any of these services, your patient must set up an account. It means that your patient is entrusting them with personal details and data. All of these services have a privacy policy (which you should read) stating they handle account details appropriately, but the fact that it is online means that there is a risk that any confidential information that is stored may be accessed by them or a third-party.

## iCloud (Apple ID)

[Read the Apple privacy statement](https://www.apple.com/uk/privacy/approach-to-privacy/)

## Dropbox

[Read the Dropbox privacy statement](https://www.dropbox.com/en_GB/privacy)

## Google Drive

[Read the Google Drive privacy statement](https://support.google.com/drive/answer/2450387?hl=en)

Please note that some third-party online data-storage services have charges for storage of data over certain limits.