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Augmentative and Alternative Communication - choosing Vocabulary.

Introduction: This information sheet gives *guidance* on how to start gathering vocabulary for a person's Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system, as it can feel like a daunting task - what do you include and what do you leave out? Please note that these are general guidelines as the amount of vocabulary and the complexity of the language, whether on a text or symbol based system, will depend on the individual's ability. Note that some AAC users have the ability to create as many unique messages as they wish.   As we are working with adults, the focus here is on adults. However, much of this information also applies to children using AAC.

Organisation and design of the AAC will depend on the adult's abilities i.e. whether you implement a category based system, topic based system, visual scene display etc., and whether the adult will have access to symbols/words for sentence building, etc.

- Always involve the adult who uses/will use AAC, their family and carers as appropriate. Don't expect the adult or their family/carers to know what words to include.

- Find out about the adult's routine, what happens during the day/week? They might be spending a lot of time at home or be active in the community, going to the shops, bank etc. Find out if they attend any clubs or engage in any activities, going to the gym etc. Vocabulary can be gathered in relation to how and where they spend their time.

- What are their hobbies and interests? They may want to have access to words to talk about current hobbies or past hobbies and interests.

- Who visits them and who do they see? They will need access to language to enable them to communicate with a range of people, such as, their close family members, friends, hair dresser, health professionals and strangers.

- Include vocabulary which enables the adult to engage in small talk e.g. *lovely weather*, make comments e.g. *that's nice!*, ask questions and give

information about themselves. Vocabulary needs to be personalised – they may want to include jokes and funny stories.

- Include core vocabulary, core words are highly frequent occurring words in our language e.g. I, it, do, that, get, go. Refer to the information sheet on core vocabulary for more information.

- Include negatives and language to enable the adult to disagree, say no, say they dislike something etc.

- It can be useful to have a symbol/word for 'it is not on here/not in my AAC book'. People using high tech (electronic) AAC devices may also benefit from having a symbol/word for 'I would like to use my communication device'.

- Prioritise activities in the first instance, as the adult will need to learn how to use their AAC, build and develop their AAC in line with their progress and in keeping with current events and activities.

- Consider including vocabulary to help deal with communication repair e.g., that's not what I meant.

- Avoid including vocabulary for messages that the person can express reliably by other means e.g. gesture, speech etc., as it is best to give them access to language they really need.

- Ask the family/carers to note down useful words as they think of them.