

# Augmentative & Alternative Communication Applications

No 26, August 2012

By Alicia Garcia, Speech-Language Pathologist

## What is Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)?

AAC allows people who have difficulty speaking to use gestures, signs, pictures, symbols or technology to express their wants, needs and thoughts. This tip sheet deals with technology used for AAC.

AAC relies on Speech Generating Devices (SGDs). At their simplest, these are machines that can record messages that their users then play back when they want or need to communicate to others. More complex devices allow people to communicate unlimited, unique messages by choosing from large sets of pictures, words or letters.

Modern technology allows commercial devices, such as the iPad and iPod Touch to be used for ACC thanks to specific ACC “apps” (software). This makes SGDs cheaper and easier to acquire than ever before. It also makes SGDs more appealing and socially acceptable for their users. In addition, users can take advantage of a wide assortment of other functions that can also support communication and language, such as taking and viewing photos or videos, accessing the internet, or using email or educational software.

## What do AAC Apps Look Like?

There are hundreds of apps for communication, ranging in price from free to \$300. As a rule of thumb, the more features offered and the more customization allowed, the more expensive the app. Even the expensive apps often have free or low-price “lite” versions that offer basic features. This allows users to try out the app without investing a lot of money and, if they want, upgrade to the full version later.

AAC apps vary greatly in how they look, but fall into these general categories:

**Apps with Pictures and Recorded Speech:** a speaking partner records messages, then the user plays the appropriate message by choosing from a set of photographs or picture symbols

**Apps with Pictures and Text-to-Speech:** the user plays the appropriate message by choosing from a set of photographs or picture symbols, which then produce the message using the device’s own text-to-speech function (no recording necessary)

**Text-Based Apps:** the device “speaks” whatever the user types on the keyboard

## How do I Choose the Right App?

Choosing the right AAC app for your child (of any age) is important: after all, you are choosing the language that your child will use to communicate and, in most cases, even the words that they will use. The ultimate goal is to match the child’s communication needs with the app’s features. With so many choices and devices to choose from, this can be difficult: whenever possible, get the advice of a specialist in communication or a speech-language pathologist with AAC knowledge. They will help you explore and consider the best app for your child based on things such as: type of pictures (photographs, line-drawings), ideal number of pictures per screen, amount and type of “navigation” (finding pictures on different screens), type of words (names, actions, describing words, etc.), function or purpose of messages (asking for things, making comments, asking questions, etc.).

## What are Some Popular AAC Apps for iPads, iPhones and iPods?

Say Hi! AAC\*: (FREE) App with pictures and recorded speech. Has up to nine customizable pictures per screen, clean interface, straightforward and very easy to program.

<http://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/say-bi!-aac/id499774007?mt=8>

Answers:YesNo HD\*: (\$3.99) App with pictures and recorded speech for the iPad. Has two large customizable buttons per screen, up to 30 screens, allows creation of “lesson plans” (sets of custom button pairs linked by navigation arrows), simple, easy presentation for basic choice-making.

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/answers-yesno-hd/id393762442?mt=8>

Scene Speak\*: (\$9.99) App with pictures and recorded speech. Presents scenes or environments (living room, kitchen, etc) containing sound areas that users can select; scenes can be personalized.

<http://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/scene-speak/id420492342?mt=8>

Assistive Chat: (\$24.99) Text-based App. It has a keyboard with large typing area, word prediction buttons and up to three different voices.

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/assistive-chat/id379891874?mt=8>

GoTalk NOW\*: (\$79.99) App with pictures and recorded speech. Has up to 25 customizable pictures per screen, large photo library with clear and crisp photographs, built-in internet image search and recorded voices; text-to-speech in variety of languages available at extra cost.

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/gotalk-now/id454176457?mt=8>

Sono Flex: (\$99.99) App with pictures and text-to-speech. Has a large library of line drawing pictures, five voices, over 50 pre-programmed boards; free Lite version available.

<http://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/sono-flex/id463697022?mt=8>

Verbally Premium: (\$99.99) Text-based App. Has a keyboard, word bank and frequent phrases; personalized

word prediction, versatile ready-to-use app for literate individuals; free Lite version available.

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/verbally-premium/id470081134?mt=8>

TapSpeak Choice\*: (\$149.99) App with pictures, recorded and text-to-speech. Has Dynavox/Mayer Johnson PCSTM picture symbol library. Has up to 56 pictures per screen.

<http://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/tapspeak-choice-for-ipad/id408507581?mt=8>

Touch-Chat HD: (\$149.99) App with pictures and text-to-speech. Has four pre-programmed page sets targeting different communication needs, allows use of grids, interactive scenes or keyboard; messages can be easily shared on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or via text message or email.

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/touchchat-hd-aac/id398860728?mt=8>

Proloquo2Go: (\$189.99) App with pictures and text-to-speech. Has large line drawing picture library, grids and keyboard with word prediction, large set of customizable features; comprehensive and easy-to-follow online training and support.

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/proloquo2go/id308368164?mt=8>

Speak for Yourself: (\$299.99) App with pictures and text-to-speech. Has up to 120 pictures per screen, comprehensive vocabulary of the words used most frequently in face-to-face communication.

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/artist/speak-for-yourself-llc/id482508201>

*\*Peut être utilisé en français*

*Please note: Prices listed are from the Apple Store, August 2012.*

## I Have the Device and the AAC App, Now What?

Having access to an AAC app does not automatically make someone able to communicate. Communication is a two-way process involving a speaker and a listener. A key component when teaching someone to use AAC apps is ensuring they understand that the device is a communication tool that they will use to express messages to someone who is listening and will respond to what they say. Learning to effectively use an SGD to express needs and wants, to share ideas, to have conversations with family and friends requires ongoing communication and language training: you should consult with a speech-language pathologist who can provide both.

## Is AAC Covered by Ontario's Health Care System?

The Assistive Devices Program of Ontario provides funding for SGDs for individuals who qualify. You will need a prescription for a device from an ADP-certified AAC team at one of the designated AAC Clinics across the province. Consult your local children's treatment center for more information.

**DISCLAIMER:** *This document reflects the views of the author. It is Autism Ontario's intent to inform and educate. Every situation is unique and while we hope this information is useful, it should be used in the context of broader considerations for each person. Please contact Autism Ontario at [info@autismontario.com](mailto:info@autismontario.com) or 416-246-9592 for permission to reproduce this material for any purpose other than personal use. © 2012 Autism Ontario 416.246.9592 [www.autismontario.com](http://www.autismontario.com)*