



# Telephone Contact with a Client who uses AAC

Some people who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) \* can use a speech-generating device and/or some speech over the telephone. Others rely on another person to make or answer calls on their behalf. Most people who use AAC have speaker-phones and their privacy may be compromised if they have attendant staff in their rooms who can hear messages left for them or overhear telephone conversations.

This document is part of a series of resources available at [www.accpc.ca](http://www.accpc.ca)

In the following guidelines, the person using AAC is referred to as the client.

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## Calling a CLIENT

- Always check to find out if you can talk freely. When leaving a message, ensure the client's privacy by not referring to any sensitive matters or fully identifying yourself or the reason for your call.
- Ask the client to tell you how he/she can communicate Yes and No on the phone (i.e. voice, tapping out a code, or selecting items on a device etc.).
- If the client has access to a speech generating device, converse as usual, providing time for him/her to construct messages.
- If the client does not have access to a speech-generating device, tell the client that you will ask a series of Yes and No questions.
- If you do not understand what the client is communicating, inform him/her. Suggest that he/she spell the word or give you a clue.
- Ask the client if he/she has someone they trust who could support them in communicating with you over the phone.
- Ask the client to prepare a message and to call you back, fax or email you.

## Other Options

- Ask the client if he/she can identify someone they trust to relay messages back and forth.
- If necessary, consider engaging a communication facilitator for this. See resources on [www.accpc.ca](http://www.accpc.ca)
- If privacy can be assured and if the client can read or be supported in reading, you may be able to use fax or email to maintain contact.

## Answering a Call

- Inform your receptionist about the client's methods of communication. Introduce them so that they can be more comfortable communicating over the phone.
- Ask the client if this is an emergency. If yes, direct the call to an appropriate staff person or if necessary, ask a series of questions about the nature of the situation.

## Resources

Available at [www.accpc.ca](http://www.accpc.ca)

\* Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to communication systems that people use to communicate. AAC includes picture, word and/or letter boards and voice output devices. People use AAC systems in different ways.