



# Working with a Client who uses AAC

Most people who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) \* require increased time for their services in order to accommodate their reduced rate of communication. They may also require attendant services, appointments that accommodate their limited and inflexi-

ble access to transportation, legal professionals who are sensitive to their need for privacy and who treat people with disabilities with respect by using appropriate disability related language.

Please refer to the series of documents in this resource for guidelines to accommodate communication ([www.accpc.ca](http://www.accpc.ca))

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

## Attendant Services

Clients may require assistance for personal care services such as putting on /taking off a coat, going to the washroom, having a snack etc. These services are usually provided by an attendant, a family member or a friend. Some clients may not have a family member or friend to assist them and may not have attendant services that can support them in the community. Due to the confidential nature of legal services, the client may not want to bring an attendant who works with them to a legal office.

- Before booking an appointment, find out if the client needs attendant services. If he/she needs one and doesn't have one, your agency will need to provide and pay for this service. Ask the client if he/she wants a same gender attendant.
- Contact attendant service agencies in your area or call the local Independent Living Centre for a list of agencies. Explain that the client uses AAC and if possible, you need an attendant familiar with communicating with people who use AAC.

- Ensure confidentiality for the client by asking the attendant to wait in another room until he / she is needed by the client and by not discussing any personal details about the client with the attendant.

## Transportation

Accessible transportation services can be inflexible and people using the services must be ready and waiting for their rides or risk missing it. Rescheduling a later pick-up time can result in hours of waiting, and missing attendant bookings for assistance at home. It is important to be sensitive to these issues.

- Ask the client at the onset of the appointment about his / her pick up time and plan on ending your session so that the client has sufficient time to get ready for the pick-up after your appointment.
- Find out how many days in advance the client needs in order to arrange his/her transportation and plan your appointments accordingly.

## Time

Schedule extra time into your appointment (for example, an hour and a half instead of half an hour). People who speak communicate at a rate of approximately 180 words per minute. Clients who use AAC may be able to communicate 10-15 words a minute. In addition, clients who use pictures or symbols to communicate may need more time to process their messages (i.e. to convert what they want to say into the pictures available to them).

## Privacy

- Find a quiet, private place free of distractions for your meeting. Speech generating devices tend to be loud and not very conducive to private conversations.
- Discuss all confidential matters privately with the client, not in the presence of the attendant or communication facilitator, unless the client has given consent for you to do this. If there is a need to share information or to negotiate follow-up appointments, referrals or transportation plans with the attendant, obtain permission from the client first.
- Ask the client if she / he would like you to write down any notes or appointment plans. If so, find out where the client would like to keep these notes so you can place them there at the end of the meeting. Be aware that attendants and caregivers often have access to the client's personal things.
- Remember that the client may have little privacy at home, especially when using a telephone. See resource on using the telephone with a person who uses AAC.

## Respect

- Always assume competency when interacting with a client who uses AAC. The inability to speak does not imply intellectual disability, reduced ability to hear or to understand. However, in some cases, a client may have additional disabilities and accommodations. Do not presume a capacity issues until all supports have been provided.
- Do not use patronizing language, altered tone of voice or increased volume when speaking to the client.
- Use appropriate disability related language (i.e. person first language such as person with a disability, not disabled person)
- Ask permission before providing assistance such as pushing the client's wheelchair.
- Do not lean on a person's wheelchair or tray.
- Do not review vocabulary in a person's communication display or book.
- Focus on communicating not on finding how a person's speech generating device works.

## Resources

[www.accpc.ca](http://www.accpc.ca) - Equal Justice Project<sup>1</sup>

This document is part of a series of resources.

\* 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Resources for Legal Professionals