Augmentative and Alternative Communication

Many adults and children experience communication difficulties as a result of injury or conditions such as head injury, stroke or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A speech pathologist can assist the individual and their family and friends to find ways to improve communication. This is where the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) may be appropriate for the individual.

Communication may be seen as an essential human need, with primary functions of communication including; expression of wants and needs, exchanging information, social closeness and etiquette. If an individual does not have any means to achieve these communication needs, this may be where AAC could be considered as an alternative. AAC is a broad term for a group of methods, strategies and techniques that support the use of functional and effective communication. People with speech and/ or language difficulties may utilize AAC to enhance their communication or replace their absent speech with the help of a Speech Pathologist.

Different AAC Types

There are a large range of different types of AAC, which may be either unaided or aided systems. Aided AAC systems may further be catergorised into either high or low technology systems. These systems may be integrated with an individual's use of body language and abilities to convey messages.

Unaided AAC: Incorporates communication strategies that do not require external resources to the individual. Some examples of unaided AAC include facial expression, sign language, and gestures.

Aided AAC: Aided AAC involves external resources which are used to assist the individual's communication. Aided AAC can be either a low technology (low-tech) system or a high technology system (high-tech).
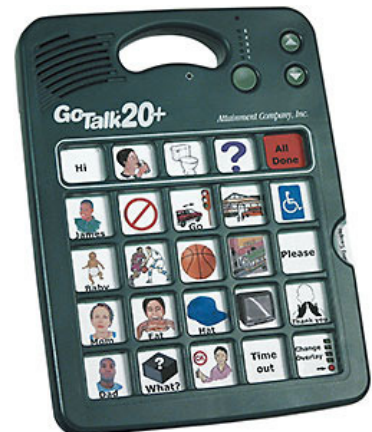
(Above: Eye-gaze Spelling Board)

Low-tech Systems:

Low-tech systems are resources that aid in communication which are not battery powered. In some cases, low-tech systems are less expensive and may be constructed with hands-on materials at home. Low-tech systems may sometimes be more durable and easier to use in environments where high-tech devices are unable to be used (For example in the shower or swimming). Common examples of low-tech systems include object symbols, communication boards, PODD Books and eye gaze spelling boards.

High-tech Systems:

Examples of high-tech systems include speech output devices, desktop computers and mobile technologies. High-tech AAC systems can be presented on static or dynamic displays. On static display devices, the language is organized into a grid format and may allow for recorded speech to be stored within the device which is then activated by pushing the corresponding button. Dynamic display devices differ in that page links are used to navigate and select symbols/ words, as the main page leads to access to various other pages.

(Above: GoTalk Static Display Device)

There are a varied range of AAC products available, contact ILC Tas for more information or arrange an appointment to see or try them in the display centre.