What is AAC?

*Augmentative and Alternative Communication* refers to a way to communicate without speech (alternative) or where speech is used together with another form of communication (augmentative). The purpose of AAC is to provide the person with a form of communication. This helps them to communicate their needs, wants and feelings. It may also positively influence their social skills, school performance, self-esteem, and generally improve their quality of life. AAC users should continue using speech if they are able to, as the system is used to enhance existing speech, repair communication breakdowns and only replace speech that is not yet developed.

*AAC systems can be divided into two categories:*

Low-Tech AAC:

* Signing
* Pictures and Photos
* Object Symbols
* Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS)
* Choice Making

High-Tech AAC:

* Voice Output Devices
* Electronic Devices
* Computers (iPad, Dynavox,

Accent, Novachat)

*When designing and selecting a system, we always consider:*

* Age
* Physical skills
* Level of development
* Individual interests
* Personality
* Environment/context
* Cost

*What about the iPad or other tablets?*

iPads are a very hot topic in the education and therapy world right now, and have made AAC much more affordable. We have found them to be very successful for some students, provided they are introduced systematically. Apps for gaming and social media can be distracting for the user learning an AAC method. The iPad is seen as only a toy and students become frustrated when they are not able to play on it. Just like all other AAC systems, it is important to consider all the factors & options before introducing an iPad.