

## AAC Etiquette

Communicating using an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) system is often significantly slower than communicating through natural speech. This significant difference in rate can alter the basic flow of conversations. The gaps of silence or pauses in the conversation that occur as the communicator who is using AAC composes their messages can feel very awkward and this provides more opportunity for others to be unintentionally impolite. It can therefore be helpful to keep a few tips in mind about how you can politely accommodate this difference in your interactions with people who use AAC. Though the “AAC Etiquette” podcast episode is meant to be light hearted, it is not meant to detract from the important points that are embedded in the “conversational fouls” that are featured. This companion handout provides a list of the conversational tips that are highlighted in the video. As you look at the list, you might realize that these tips relate to being polite when talking with anyone but they are particularly helpful to keep in mind when talking with someone who communicates slowly using AAC.

**Conversational Foul #1:** Never talk about someone who is present during a conversation. Talk to them.

**Conversational Foul #2:** Don’t “hog” the conversation. Be sure to provide adequate time for others to respond, even if it means giving extra pauses and time for them to take their conversational turn.

**Conversational Foul #3:** Don’t fire quick questions at people during conversations and avoid presenting bunches of questions that can be answered just by “yes” or “no”. Give people time to answer your question and consider using open-ended questions.

**Conversational Foul #4:** Always check with people before you start finishing their sentences and guessing about what they are going to say. Though these strategies may be well intended, some people just don’t like it and it can get the conversation off track if you guess wrong.

**Conversational Foul #5:** Be honest. Let people know when you don’t understand what they were trying to communicate. You might think you are being nice by just nodding your head politely but it is really disrespectful. It suggests that what the person is communicating is not important and it also does not lead to finding out what they were really trying to say. Enhancing Participation in Employment Settings Through AAC [www.waisman.wisc.edu/aac](http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/aac) podcast #12: AAC Etiquette Podcast training project funded by: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Medicaid Infrastructure Grant CFDA #93.768 Wisconsin Department of Health Services/Pathways to Independence 2.

**Conversational Foul #6:** Don't make assumptions and judgments about others based on appearances. Avoid talking "down" to others or talking unnecessarily loudly. Not everyone who has a speech impairment or who is in a wheelchair has problems hearing or understanding what you are saying.

**Conversational Foul #7:** Always respect the personal space of others. Keep in mind that items such as wheelchairs and trays, AAC devices, and other adaptations are a part of the personal space of people who use them. It is always polite to check in with people prior to touching or even assisting with their wheelchairs, AAC devices, etc.

**Conversational Foul #8:** People who use AAC often must plan ahead for situations where there is a lot to communicate in a short time frame, such as giving a presentation during a staff meeting. Fortunately, today's AAC devices offer the option of preparing messages needed in advance of situations. With that in mind, it is extremely helpful for people who use AAC devices to know as far in advance as possible what topics, questions, or other communication expectations are coming up, allowing them to be as prepared as possible for these situations. Any time you are a good listener in a conversation, you are demonstrating respect and confirming that what others are communicating is important to you. Patient, respectful listening is never more important than when you are talking with someone who uses an AAC system. Hopefully these tips and strategies will help you avoid being a conversational klutz!

*Enhancing Participation in Employment Settings Through AAC*  
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