

Do's and Don'ts of AAC - Wait time

Providing enough time to people who use AAC is very important, as using AAC to communicate takes time. We as communication partners need to provide enough of it for the person using AAC to claim their turn in the conversation, to process what was said and what they want to say and then compose their message.

There is a reason why providing wait time appears on so many lists of supports and interventions for AAC users. All people who use AAC, whether young and just learning or accomplished adult, need enough time. Using AAC to communicate takes time and we as communication partners need to provide enough of it for the person using AAC to claim their turn in the conversation, to process what was said and what they want to say and then compose their message.

This one should be easy but for so many of us, it's hard and takes practice. Regardless of whether the AAC is an app on an iPad, a dedicated device or a sheet of paper, it takes time and it's up to us to make sure that it is provided.

The perfect pause

In her PrAACtical AAC article, [On Not Talking](#), Carole Zangari describes it as the “perfect pause”. She reminds us, “There is power in the perfect pause.”

Why provide enough wait time?

- To let the user know it's their turn
- To provide time for the user to process what you said
- To give the user time to take their turn

And it works! A study by Hilary Johanna Mathis entitled “[The effect of pause time upon the communicative interactions of young people who use augmentative and alternative communication](#)”, demonstrated that when a communication partner provides pause time, the AAC user is more likely to claim their turn and respond with more words. This study suggests that providing a wait time (up to 45 seconds) supports users to claim more conversations turns and use more words.

Now that we have convinced you how important it is to pause and wait, we would like to share information with siblings and peers so they, too can become a more supportive communication partner:

When you're talking with a sibling or friend who uses AAC, patience is key. A conversation is going to take longer because they have more things they need to do.

For siblings and peers

What do Star Wars and AAC have in common? Jedi training, of course! When Anakin began his training under Obi-Wan, the first and most important thing he had to learn was patience. And when you're talking with a sibling or friend who uses AAC, patience is key. A conversation is going to take

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longer because they have more things they need to do. You think about what you're going to say and your brain tells your mouth to move and say it. They think about what they're going to say, their brain tells them what they need to move to use their talker or board, and then they need to remember what page to go to, get there, possibly spell things out, all while not forgetting what they wanted to say and how to say it. It's slow going. Worth it, but slow going. With that in mind, here are some tips on how to be an excellent communication partner, Jedi style.

- **Practice being a good listener.** Look them in the eye and focus on them and your conversation.
- **Ask lots of open-ended questions.** Do you ask all your friends just yes or no questions? Of course not! That would be boring. Rather than asking, "Do you like Rey?," try, "Who's your favorite character in Star Wars?" After you've asked, time for that patience to come out.
- **Wait for them to talk, don't say a word, and keep looking at them.** Show how interested you are. Count to five in your head (One Mississippi, Two Mississippi...). That feels like a long time, but it's okay.
- **If they haven't begun starting their answer, glance down at their talker and smile encouragingly.** This is a prompt, or reminder, that they should be taking their turn.
- **Still nothing? Give them an idea.** "I like Finn and Leia a lot, but Rey is my favorite. She's such a great fighter! What about you?" Then start the waiting over again. (See what I said about patience? It takes practice, but you'll get the hang of it!)
- **Not all communication is spoken - respond to it all.** Did they make a horrified face when you mentioned Finn, Leia or Rey? That's an answer, too! "Wait, you don't like Leia? Why not?!" They better have a very good answer to that question. Wait for it.
- If they are answering, well, **keep up the good work!** Keep the conversation moving, each of you taking turns.

That's not the only way you can be an excellent communication partner, though. For example, sometimes you'll be hanging out with your friend or sibling, and someone comes over with a question. But instead of asking your friend about their talker, they turn to YOU and ask. Don't let them get away with this! Smile and tell them, "Oh, Jack's the one you want to talk to. Ask him!" or "I'll let Jack explain." This is called being a facilitator. Let him do the talking and explaining. It is his talker, after all. * You can stand behind your friend or sibling, but try not to look at the person who came over. You want to encourage them to talk to him, not you. It can take patience to show new people how to be a good communication partner, but it's important. * If they need help remembering what page something is on, or how to say something, you can lean down and whisper into their ear or point to the board. This is only if they really need help, though, and after showing off your patience and silent counting. And there you have it! With just a bit of Jedi patience, it'll be no time before you're debating whether Han shot first.