Using the Means, Reasons and Opportunities for AAC and Assistive Technology (Version 2) Resource

Contents

Introduction

The Means, Reasons and Opportunities for AAC and AT (V2) resource has been created in two different formats; as a Grid 3 file designed to be accessed using Grid 3 or Mind Express software, and as a Global Access symbol board.

The words included are the same in each format, but the symbol set and software used to create the resources is different in order to make it as accessible and useable for as many people as possible.

Both options are designed to be printed and used as paper-based resources. If required, the resource could be adapted for use via an individual's powered AAC system.

This document provides some further information and guidance about using the Means, Reasons and Opportunities Resource for AAC and AT (V2) resource.

Purpose

The main purpose of the resource is to help an AAC user's communication partner (e.g. caregiver, teacher, parent or therapist) structure and hold a conversation with the user about their means, reasons and opportunities for using assistive technology.

The key to the resource is that it can be used flexibly. Please see the Examples section for some specific examples of how and why you might use the resource.

It is important to think about **why** the conversation is needed before engaging with the resource. This helps to ensure that you are prepared and that the information obtained is useful.

Preparing and using the Resource

In both formats, the resource can be personalised to meet the needs of the user. For example, the symbol set could be changed, photographs added, colour schemes changed or language altered. You could also include additional or different vocabulary as needed.

As the resource is designed to be paper-based, the pages that you require will need to be printed out for use.

Unless you are using whole sheets of symbols, we find it useful to cut out individual symbols and arrange them securely under each topic page for storage. This is not essential but makes sure that symbols stay organised and are quickly accessible as you are carrying out your conversation with the user.

The first few pages of the resource include symbolised topic words (section 1) and headings, designed for sorting words beneath (section 2). The rest of the resource is made up of pages of topic-based words with symbols for sorting.

Before deciding on which headings to use, it is important to establish whether the user understands the meaning of those words. For example, they may understand the word "good" but not the word "easy". Similarly, consider how complex the question is that you are asking, and whether the user will be able to reliably respond to it.
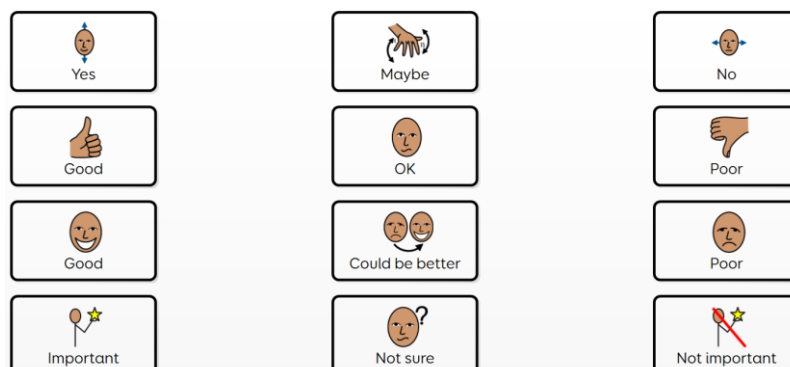
Considering the Access Method

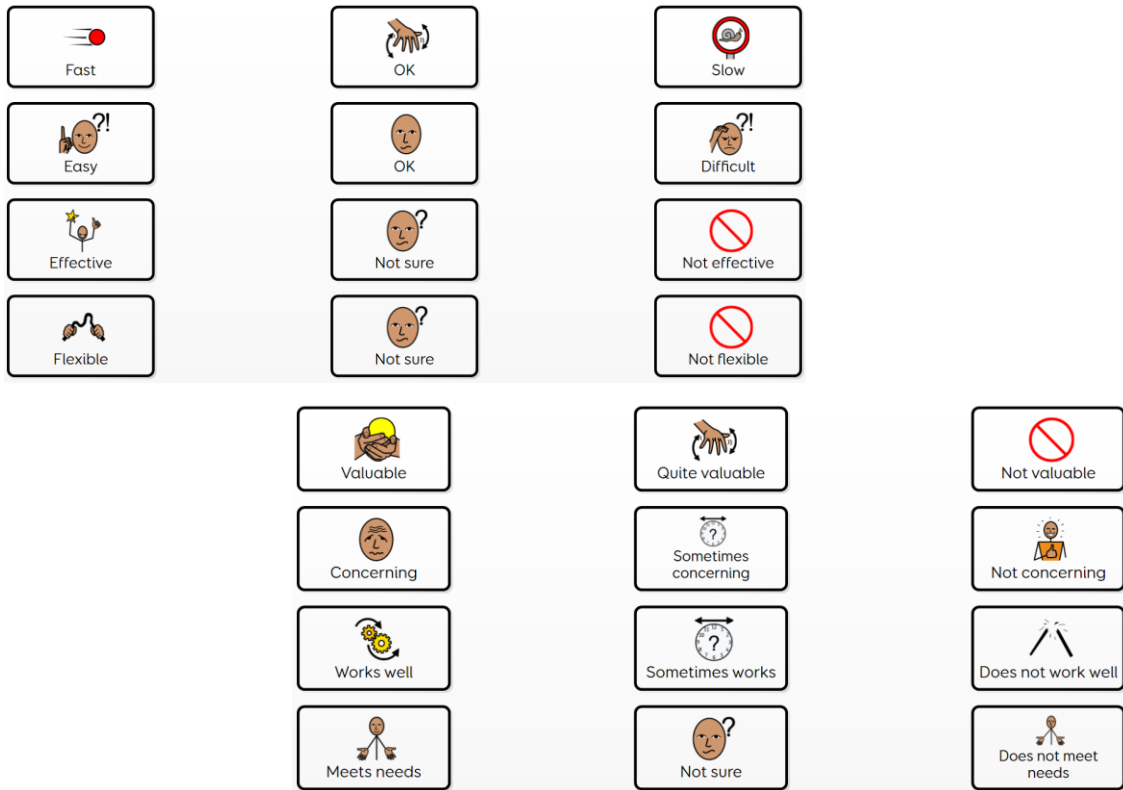The resource can be accessed via a range of different methods, for example:

- **Direct access**: Cut out the headings and topic-based symbols. Offer the user one symbol at a time and ask them to place the symbol under their chosen heading
- **Eye pointing:** Cut out the headings and place them on an E-tran frame or Eye Link board. Cut out the topic-based symbols. Offer the user one topic-based symbol at a time and ask them to eye point to their chosen heading.
- **Partner assisted scanning:**
  1. Present the headings on a single sheet (it may be useful to cut out a row of your chosen headings). Show the user which topic-based symbol you are referring to, either with them presented individually or together but on a separate page. Talk through each heading in turn, and ask the user to tell you to stop when you reach their chosen heading for the symbol you are referring to.
  2. Alternatively, show the user a sheet of topic-based symbols. Explain the headings you are using and ask them to use their 'yes' and 'no' response to indicate a positive or negative response e.g. important = 'yes' response, not important = 'no' response.

Please see the videos on the Barnsley Assistive Technology website for more general demonstration of how to support AAC users different access methods: Resources and Information.

Headings

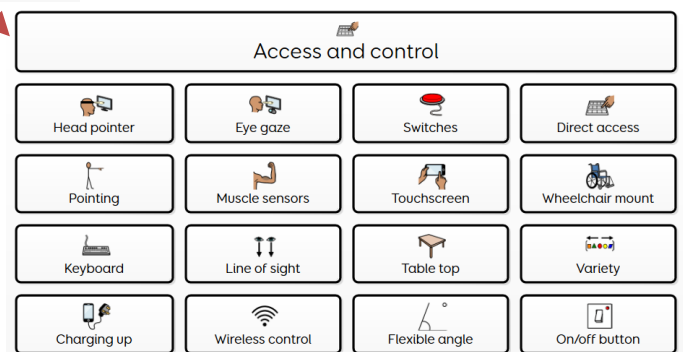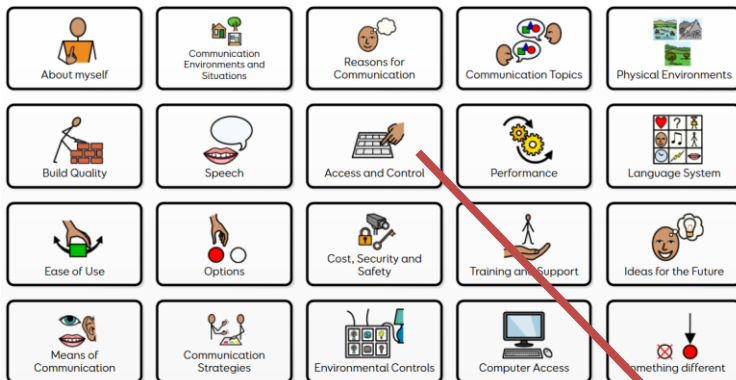The following headings are available as symbols to use as part of the resource (section 2):

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Fast | OK | Slow

Easy | OK | Difficult

Effective | Not sure | Not effective

Flexible | Not sure | Not flexible

Valuable | Quite valuable | Not valuable

Concerning | Sometimes concerning | Not concerning

Works well | Sometimes works | Does not work well

Meets needs | Not sure | Does not meet needs

Topics

These are the topics that you might like to discuss with a user, and examples of vocabulary from one topic ('access and control') that you can sort under the above headings. It is important to always include a 'something different' symbol to give the user the opportunity to communicate something that has not been included.

About myself | Communication Environments and Situations | Reasons for Communication | Communication Topics | Physical Environments

Build Quality | Speech | Access and Control | Performance | Language System

Ease of Use | Options | Cost, Security and Safety | Training and Support | Ideas for the Future

Means of Communication | Communication Strategies | Environmental Controls | Computer Access | Something different

Access and control

Head pointer | Eye gaze | Switches | Direct access

Pointing | Muscle sensors | Touchscreen | Wheelchair mount

Keyboard | Line of sight | Table top | Variety

Charging up | Wireless control | Flexible angle | On/off button

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Examples

Here are some examples of how you could use the resource to facilitate a conversation:

What you hope to find out	Headings to sort under	Symbols to prepare (could also use personalised symbols or photos)	Example question
Goal setting- AAC What topics the user would like to be able to talk about	Important, not sure, not important	Topics already on the user's system along with other words from topics page e.g. personal care, food, drinks, technology, people	*"What do you think about talking about [the weather]? Is it important, not sure, or not important?"*
Goal setting- EC or CA What the user would like to be able to do using Facebook	Important, not sure, not important	Apps- Facebook page e.g. like post, comment, send emoji	*"Is [liking a post] on Facebook important, not sure, not important?"*
Problem solving: What is not working about an AAC user's current communication system	Good, ok, poor OR Like, don't know, dislike	Communication aid pages e.g. Weight, voice, access method, speed, battery life, colour	*"What do you think about the [weight] of your [Communication aid]?"*
Measuring progress/ patient reported outcome measure: To help measure progress before and after assessment	Good, not sure, poor	AAC- Means/ People/Places/ Reasons for communication pages EC/CA- Environmental controls, computer access, apps pages	*"Thinking about your [communication/control of the environment/what you can do on your computer/smart phone], how do you feel you are managing with [talking to your friends]?"*

Case study examples

Case example 1 - Supporting decision-making about a user's AAC preferences

L is a 14-year-old boy with Cerebral Palsy. He has no intelligible speech and uses a number of unaided AAC strategies to communicate with others including pointing, looking, yes/no responses, changes in facial expression or body language. He also uses some aided AAC tools, including a communication book with partner-assisted scanning and an eye gaze device.

During the symbol supported conversation, outcomes of the assessment were fed back to L with symbol support and he was involved in decision-making around his aided AAC. The following topics were discussed with L and he was asked to communicate his opinions using symbol choices:

- How L communicates
- Pros and cons of the eye gaze device
- Pros and cons of the communication book

A new board was set up in front of L for each of the above discussions using general headings (Good, Not Sure, Poor). These were discussed and agreed with L first. A range of different topic words were identified prior to the session specifically relating to the questions being discussed. Topic symbols were presented one at a time and L was asked to look to the heading he wanted to place the symbol under. This was clarified with a yes/no question and response.

From this supported conversation, the following information was gathered:
- L agreed that he uses the following range of methods to communicate: pointing, looking, yes/no responses (nodding/shaking head), facial expression, communication book and eye gaze device.
- He liked that his eye gaze device had a voice and more words than his book, but did not like that it could make him tired and could sometimes not work or can get in the way.
- L liked that his communication book doesn't get in the way and that he can have help to use this, but also didn't like that it doesn't have a voice and it is hard for him to use.
- L communicated that he did not prefer one or the other but wanted to continue to use both methods depending on the situation.

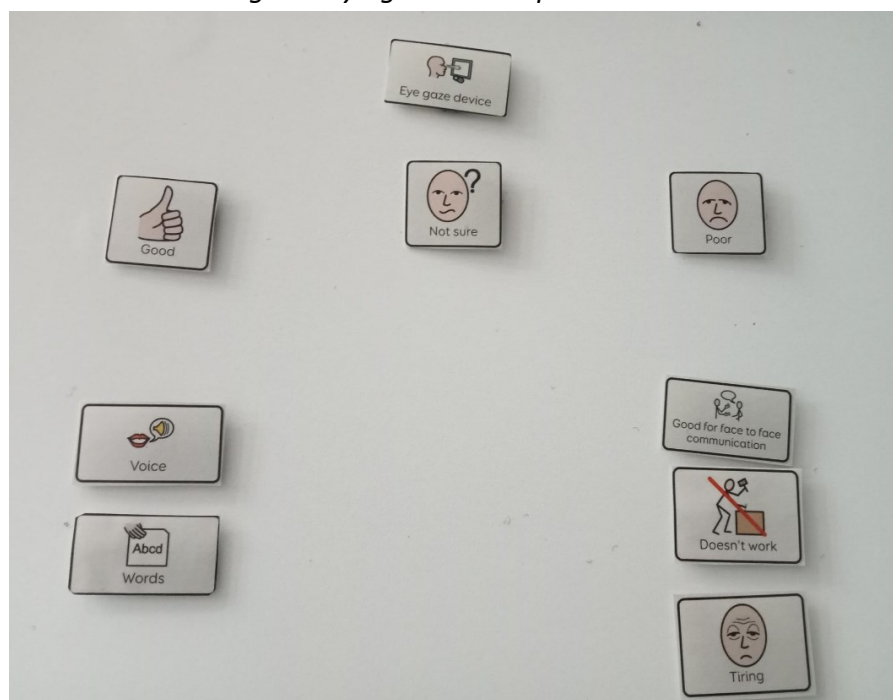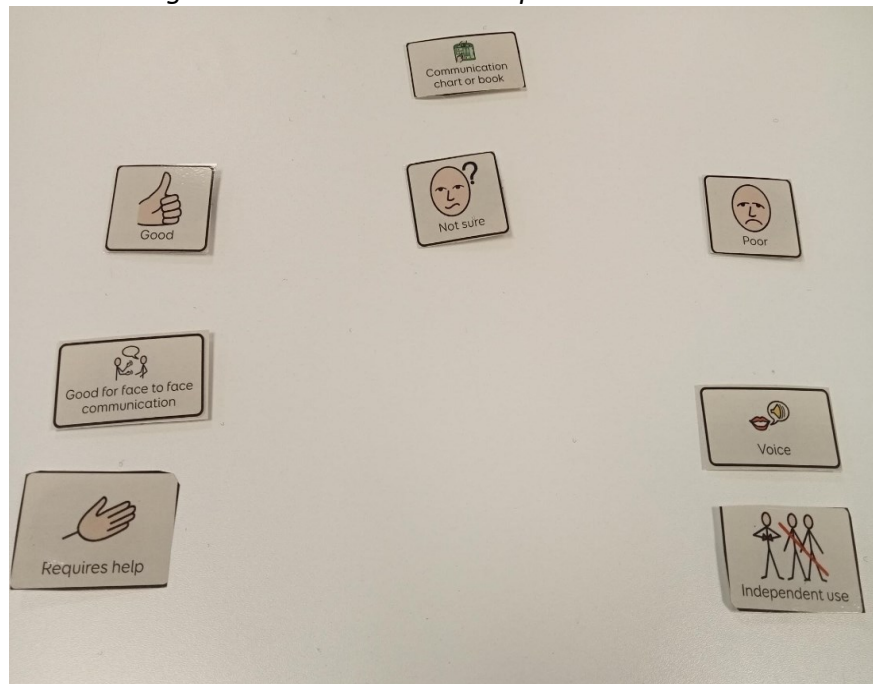*Image 1: Eye gaze device pros and cons*

Image 2: Communication book pros and cons

Case example 2- Child with AAC, problem solving reluctance to use powered AAC

H is a 7-year-old girl with quadriplegic Cerebral Palsy. H had been trialling a powered AAC device from the Barnsley Assistive Technology Team with eye gaze access. She had not been using her device very often and would look away when it was put on for her, preferring to communicate via alternative strategies. The resource was used to identify important and less important topics to her. It was also used to find out how she felt about using her device for different reasons.

The assessment revealed that lots of the communication opportunities that she was experiencing were actually not very motivating for her, such as talking about the weather or saying what she wanted for lunch. It also revealed some of the things that she found difficult with the device. After sorting some of the symbols, H was asked yes and no questions to help to narrow down what she meant.

H's goals were adjusted to reflect this and include more motivating situations like telling friends what she had been doing and talking about her pets. It also helped staff to know which situations she needed more support to use the device in, such as to indicate her feelings. This greatly increased her motivation to use the device.

Image 1: Important vs not important topics

Image 2: Easy and difficult reasons for communication with eye gaze device
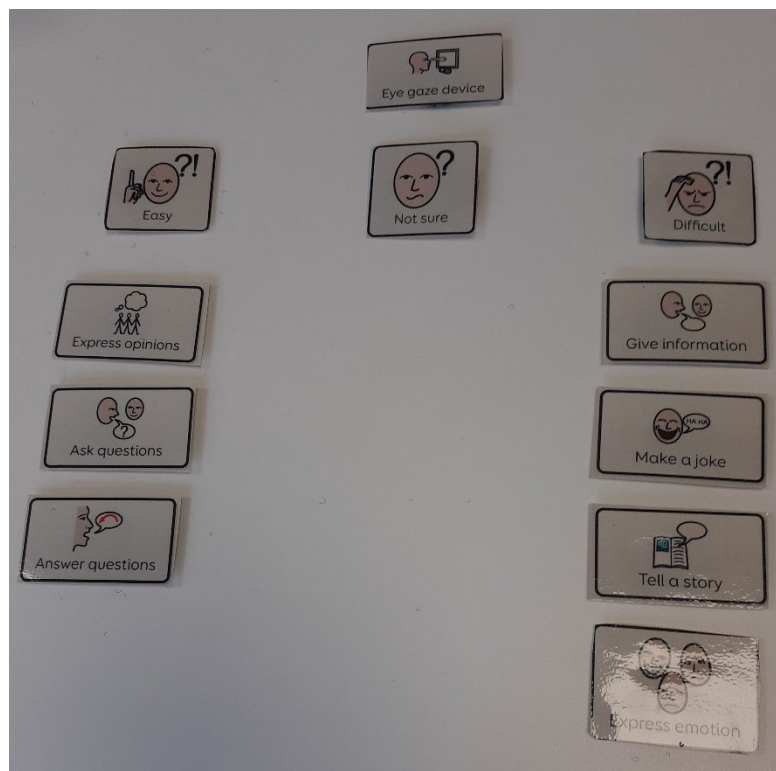
Related Resources

The Means, Reasons and Opportunities for using AAC Resource:
https://www.barnsleyhospital.nhs.uk/assistive-technology/resource/means-reasons-opportunities-aac/

The ACE Centre Readiness for Using AAC Resource
https://acecentre.org.uk/projects/talking-mats-for-aac

Videos on alternative access methods:
- Using an Eye Link board with symbols:
  https://www.barnsleyhospital.nhs.uk/assistive-technology/resource/using-an-eye-link-board-with-symbols/
- Using a symbol chart with partner assisted scanning:
  https://www.barnsleyhospital.nhs.uk/assistive-technology/resource/using-a-symbol-chart-with-row-column-partner-assisted-scanning/

Acknowledgements

The original Means Reasons and Opportunities Resource was developed by Simon Judge, Nicky Randall and Zoë Clarke following a research project which was undertaken in conjunction with Devices for Dignity in 2010. The project looked at communication aid users' views of communication aids and their priorities: Means, Reasons and Opportunities for AAC

Publishing Information

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