Picture AAC Boards You Can Personalize

Caregiver guide for parents, caregivers, and professionals

What this pack is

A set of printable picture-and-word communication boards for families supporting autistic children, roughly ages 2 to 10. Choose and personalize the boards based on how your child communicates and how your child can reach a board, not on age alone.

- Everyday communication board: core words plus social words, feelings, discomfort, and everyday requests.
- Four routine boards: dressing, meals, play, and toileting.
- Core words sit in the same place on every board (the left three columns, inside the heavy frame), so a familiar word is easy to find wherever you are in the day.
- Blank cells on every board for the people, objects, and interests that matter to your child.

What this pack is not

This is a starter communication resource. It is not a complete or individualized AAC system, and it does not replace an evaluation by a speech-language pathologist or AAC team. It is printable only: there is no sound, app, or tap-to-speak feature, and it has not been tested with any device or app. It does not promise changes in speech, language, behavior, or development. It has not been clinically reviewed.

If you also use another set of AAC boards, choose one set to start with and stay with it, because changing pictures and layouts can make familiar words harder to find.

How to use the boards

1. Keep a board within reach where communication happens, such as the table, the bathroom, or the play area. Offer it. Never require it.
2. Point to key symbols while you speak. If you say, "Do you want more?", touch want and more as you say them. Point to a few important words, not every word. Many AAC teams call this modeling or aided language input.
3. Pause. After you speak or point, wait quietly and look interested. Count slowly to ten, or longer. Silence gives your child time to respond.
4. Respond to every kind of communication. Speech, sounds, gestures, pointing, looking, leading you by the hand, pushing something away, and using a device all count as messages. Respond to them as communication, and point to a matching symbol as you do.
5. Honor stop, no, don't want, and break whenever it is safe. Respecting these words shows your child that communicating works.
6. Do not ask your child to imitate ("say it" or "show me") before giving something they clearly want, and do not physically guide your child's hand to a symbol. Your child decides whether and how to use the board.

Use the everyday board for general conversation. Use a routine board at the start of the matching routine, such as the dressing board while choosing clothes.

Personalizing the boards

- Fill blank cells with names or photos of people, favorite toys and foods, places, and interests. Write the word under each picture.
- Add words your child already shows interest in, a few at a time.
- Keep the core words where they are. Moving them makes them harder to find.
- If a board feels crowded, cover cells you do not need yet with sticky notes.
- Photos of your child's own cup, shoes, or toys can be easier to recognize than drawings. Use whichever works for your child.

Vision and movement needs

Vision

- Use the full-color version for stronger outlines, and matte paper to reduce glare. Good lighting helps.
- Print larger on bigger paper at a print shop if needed, and cover cells so fewer symbols show at once.
- Ask your child's vision specialist about symbol size and contrast.

Movement

- Place the board where your child can reach it: flat on a table, on a tray, or upright on a wall or easel.
- Accept pointing with a finger, fist, elbow, foot, or head, and looking toward a symbol.
- If pointing is hard, try partner-assisted scanning: you point to or name symbols one at a time, and your child answers with their usual yes signal, such as a look, a smile, a sound, or a movement.
- Ask your child's occupational therapist, physical therapist, or speech-language pathologist about positioning and access methods.

Some children prefer fewer pictures, matte or textured paper, or a board in a folder or on a clipboard. Let your child choose.

If your child already uses AAC

Talk with your child's AAC team before using this pack. Keep your child's familiar vocabulary and layout, and do not move or replace the symbols they already use. This pack may help as a temporary backup or for one routine, if the team agrees.

About this pack

Created by Chinaedu Okwumabua, an occupational therapy assistant with more than 20 years of experience supporting children with autism and developmental delays. This pack was not written by a speech-language pathologist and has not been clinically reviewed by a speech-language pathologist or AAC team.

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