THE FOUR PILLARS MY VOICE TOOLKIT

A practical, child-centred communication resource for primary schools, secondary schools and specialist provision.

BRIAN'S • WAVES • CIRCLES • BRIDGES

Staff guidance / Adapted teaching activities / AAC-aware communication boards / Printable planning and review templates

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This resource is a practical educational framework, not a clinical AAC assessment, a standardised communication system or a substitute for specialist advice, an individual EHCP, medical planning or safeguarding procedures.

START HERE

What this toolkit is - and is not

The aim is simple: make it easier for a child to be heard, understood, respected and supported across an ordinary school day.

Inside the package

- Professional implementation guidance for teachers, TAs, SENCOs, pastoral staff and leaders.
- Primary, secondary and complex communication pathways with worked examples.
- Small-group and whole-class activities that do not require speech.
- Customisable core communication boards, choice strips, pupil voice documents and review forms.

What My Voice means

Communication may happen through speech, writing, signs, facial expressions, movement, gesture, pointing, photographs, objects, eye gaze, partner-assisted scanning or electronic AAC. Adults should not rank speech above other valid forms.

Safeguards and limitations

- Do not remove or replace a child's established AAC system, or rearrange its vocabulary without specialist and user input.
- Do not interpret a board selection as a diagnosis, proof of an event, or consent to any treatment.
- Follow current school safeguarding, health, access and data-protection policies.
- Use qualified speech and language therapy (SLT), occupational therapy and specialist AAC input where needed.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Before printing boards, confirm the child's vocabulary, access method and communication preferences with the child and relevant support team.

START HERE

Quick-start: the first 20 minutes

A safe starting routine for any member of school staff.

1. Ask rather than assume

Find out how this pupil already communicates. Check their pupil passport, EHCP provisions where relevant, agreed AAC resources and family/SLT advice. Ask the pupil directly using their preferred method.

2. Make communication available

Keep the current device, board, signing method or other tool within reach and usable. Provide an accessible backup plan if a device is unavailable.

3. Offer meaningful messages

Make “stop”, “no”, “help”, “not sure”, “wait”, “something else” and “I need time” possible. Include commenting and social interaction, not only requests.

4. Demonstrate without testing

Model a message naturally: “I am going to take a break,” while pointing to BREAK, if the pupil uses that vocabulary. There is no demand to copy.

5. Respond and repair

Honour the meaning where possible. If unclear, check neutrally: “I think you mean X. Is that right?” Accept correction, uncertainty or no answer.

6. Share carefully

Brief the authorised staff who need to know. Record practical adjustments; store sensitive material securely rather than placing it on public display.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Choose one classroom routine today where every pupil can communicate without being required to speak aloud.

START HERE

How to use the materials

Suggested organisation

- Part A: principles, safety, partner skills and staff decision-making.
- Part B: age-respectful primary, secondary and complex communication pathways.
- Part C: six structured teaching activities and fictional cases.
- Part D: implementation, monitoring and communication with families.
- Printable library P01-P30: photocopy selected sheets, adapt wording and provide individual access.

Printing guidance

- Print communication boards at 100% scale on A4; laminate only when appropriate for hygiene, glare and access.
- The large printed labels are intentionally text-first; use a child's established symbol set, licensed symbols or their own photographs where this assists understanding.
- Test spacing, contrast, motor access, glare, mounting, durability and portability with the pupil.
- An empty space is not permission for an adult to invent a child's preference.

Recommended minimum set for a classroom

P02 Core messages; P03 Everyday needs; P06 Boundaries; P09 Learning; P15 Discreet secondary strip (where relevant); P24 Staff desk card. Then personalise, rather than issuing every board to every pupil.

Staff note

Pupil-specific communication plans are sensitive records. A generic board can be on a wall; a named disclosure, medical detail, family concern or personal support profile should be stored under school policy.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Select one "universal" board and one individually tailored board; trial them with a real task before scaling up.

FOUNDATION

Four Pillars: a communication lens

The pillars are a shared educational language, not labels applied to a child.

BRIAN'S - how I think and process

Offer multiple ways to explain an idea; allow thinking time, questions, alternatives, uncertainty and changing an answer. Avoid equating silence with lack of understanding.

WAVES - what I notice and need

Invite pupils to identify sensory, emotional or bodily experiences in their own words. A child may not want or know an emotion label; focus on choices and adjustments.

CIRCLES - what helps me feel prepared

Make routines, transitions, change, personal boundaries and predictability clear. Share plans in formats the child can access.

BRIDGES - how we connect

Support communication with trusted adults and peers; respect differences in interaction style, preferred distance, eye contact and contact frequency.

Shared example

Before lunch: a pupil indicates "too noisy" (Wave). An adult accepts it and offers a quieter route (Circle). The pupil selects an option through AAC (Bridge) after time to process (Brian's).

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Ask "What is this pupil trying to tell us - and what can we change?" rather than "How do we make them behave?"

FOUNDATION

Non-negotiable communication rights

Children can communicate more than compliance

- A pupil may say NO, STOP or NOT NOW; adults should notice and respond, explaining any genuine safety limit in an accessible way.
- A pupil can request help, privacy, a break, a different person, a change of method or more time.
- A pupil can communicate doubt, disagreement, humour, identity, personal interests and friendship - not only basic care needs.
- A pupil may prefer not to answer, or may communicate through a trusted partner or device.

Do not make communication a reward

Never withhold a child's communication system as punishment or insist on eye contact, speech, "good sitting" or a repeated demonstration before supporting a basic need.

Important distinction

Respect for refusal is essential but does not cancel adults' legal duties around protection, supervision or emergency care. Explain what happens next, offer all safe choices available and involve appropriate staff.

Rights-based check

When a child uses a message, ask: "Did somebody acknowledge it? Did it change what adults did? If not, did the adult explain why?"

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Observe one routine: who gets to say "no", how is it expressed, and what happens next?

FOUNDATION

Understanding AAC - the essentials

AAC means augmentative and alternative communication. It supports communication alongside or instead of speech and may be temporary or lifelong.

Unaided and aided forms

- Unaided: signs, facial expression, gesture, body movement and naturally used vocalisations.
- Aided low-tech: alphabet charts, objects of reference, photos, communication books, topic boards and pencil-and-paper.
- Aided high-tech: electronic communication devices, access switches, eye-gaze systems and AAC apps, when individually appropriate.

Why one-size-fits-all fails

Access needs differ. A pupil might be able to point one day but need scanning during illness or fatigue. Some rely on a carefully learned symbol layout; moving icons can make a system harder to use.

Partner responsibility

Adults make AAC usable by having it present, allowing enough time, modelling naturally, repairing misunderstandings without blame and accepting the pupil’s message rather than steering to a preferred answer.

Specialist input

An SLT-led assessment may identify language and communication needs; an OT or specialist technology service may advise on positioning, access or equipment. Do not independently prescribe an access method.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Use this toolkit to increase access to communication, not to replace an existing vocabulary or access plan.

FOUNDATION

Access routes: choosing without guessing

Direct access

Pointing, touching, typing, selecting a picture or writing may work where the child has reliable control and the board is physically reachable. Consider accuracy, fatigue and movement, not just whether a selection happened once.

Alternative and supported access

- Eye pointing: use only a method the child reliably understands and can access; partner interpretation must be checked.
- Partner-assisted scanning: the adult offers agreed choices neutrally, with a reliable yes/no signal and timing; use an established protocol where available.
- Switch, joystick or powered access: specialist assessment and equipment positioning may be required.
- Objects of reference and tactile choices: meaningful to some children with complex sensory and communication needs, when individually introduced.

Accessible display decisions

Consider physical position, viewing distance, symbol complexity, font size, visual field, auditory alternatives, environmental noise and the pupil’s reading, language and sensory needs.

When access is not reliable

Do not report a guessed or prompted selection as the child’s clear choice. Record uncertainty, offer another access route, consult relevant specialists and keep safeguarding vigilance.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Plan an agreed backup communication route for absences, device failure and visits outside the classroom.

FOUNDATION

The communication partner: ten practical habits

- Position yourself so the pupil can access you and their communication system; do not move or take control of their device without agreement.
- Notice and value gestures, movement, gaze, expressions, words, silence and device output.
- Allow genuine processing time; do not repeatedly fill pauses with more questions.
- Model vocabulary in authentic interactions without demanding imitation.
- Give a choice only when both options are truly available.
- Make room for “something else”, “none”, “I don’t know” and “change my mind”.
- Use ordinary age-respectful language; reduce complexity when helpful, not dignity.
- Repeat back tentatively to check meaning rather than decide it for the pupil.
- Support conversation about friends, interests and opinions, not just compliance.
- Follow the pupil’s communication plan and update practice with them and specialists.

A neutral repair script

“I’m not sure I understood. I thought you meant [message]. Is that right, or do you want to show me another way?”

Avoid

Do not make the pupil “prove” their message; do not physically guide hands onto an answer without agreed clinical/individual support; do not put words in their mouth.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Pair up: practise one minute of waiting and listening, then ask your partner what helped them stay in control.

SAFETY

When a child says NO or STOP

Immediate first response

Stop the non-essential activity, acknowledge the message and check whether the pupil needs space, a different option or support. Avoid debating whether the refusal is “reasonable”.

When a safety duty limits the choice

Use calm, concrete language: “I hear ‘no’. I need to keep everyone safe. You can stand here with me or beside the door.” Record and review recurring conflicts and adjust the environment where possible.

Personal space and touch

Tell pupils before approaching, touching possessions or giving physical support; ask permission when feasible. Follow individual care plans and school policy for necessary care, urgent safety and staff conduct.

Do not manufacture agreement

Lack of protest does not imply agreement. A pupil who freezes, withdraws, echoes or appears to comply may still be uncomfortable. Give a safe way to refuse and respond to non-verbal signals.

When to seek additional help

If the refusal indicates pain, distress, inaccessible demands, an unsafe interaction or a safeguarding concern, follow the relevant route rather than using a reward or sanction to force participation.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Write down two school situations where “no” is heard but not effectively acted on; plan safer choices.

SAFETY

Safeguarding: communication without speech

This page supports - and does not replace - your school safeguarding policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.

A concern may arrive in any format

A pupil might point to “not safe”, select an AAC message, write a note, avoid someone, indicate distress or show a change in communication. Do not assume a communication difficulty prevents disclosure.

Do

- Stay calm; acknowledge and take the communication seriously.
- Make sure the pupil is immediately safe and can keep accessing their preferred communication route.
- Listen without interrogation or suggestion; allow time.
- Record the exact words, symbols, sequence, gestures and context as accurately as possible, clearly separating observation from interpretation.
- Report promptly to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) using school procedure. Follow immediate-danger procedures if required.
- Explain simply who needs to know and why. Never promise secrecy.

Do not

- Do not use a board to lead a child towards a particular allegation or answer.
- Do not investigate, test consistency, ask repetitive questions or confront someone implicated.
- Do not store safeguarding disclosures in a public daily-wave chart, class display or routine home-school book.

Current KCSIE 2026 requires all staff to read Part One in full; this summary cannot substitute for it [1].

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Print P30 for staff, but keep sensitive records only in the authorised school safeguarding system.

SAFETY

Distinguish wellbeing, pain and risk

Physical discomfort is communication

A child may use PAIN, SICK, TOO HOT, DIZZY, TOILET or something more indirect. Take the message seriously and use the school's health, first aid and individual care plan processes. Never assume a physical symptom is "just a Wave".

When the message is unclear

Offer the person's established pain/needs vocabulary and allow another method (writing, body map, talking privately, AAC). Use neutral checks; do not steer by asking only the questions that fit your initial guess.

Escalation

- Urgent or serious symptoms: follow first-aid/emergency procedures without delay.
- Possible abuse, neglect or unsafe environment: notify DSL through safeguarding routes.
- Repeated barriers accessing care, toileting or hydration: inform SENCO and relevant care/health teams.

Body map use

A body map can help indicate discomfort, but do not use the resource to elicit forensic information, diagnose injury, or request unnecessary private details.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Keep a pupil's actual health and personal-care information confidential; generic needs cards may remain accessible.

SAFETY

Confidentiality, privacy and records

What can be visible?

General communication boards, staff skill reminders and anonymous class options can be shared widely. A named pupil profile, trauma disclosure, medical history or personal “safe people” list should be shared only with authorised staff who need it.

Recording appropriately

- Record what the pupil actually communicated, by what method, and in what context.
- Mark uncertainty rather than inventing meaning.
- Record adult responses and practical changes agreed with the pupil.
- Use school-approved secure systems, retention schedules, privacy notices and safeguarding routes.
- Invite pupil and family input as appropriate, except where doing so could introduce safeguarding risk.

Rights and responsibilities

Data protection does not prevent lawful safeguarding information-sharing. Follow the school’s Data Protection Officer (DPO) and DSL guidance and relevant statutory obligations.

Technology

Do not photograph a child’s AAC screen or record personal communication on an unauthorised device. Obtain proper organisational permissions and use approved systems.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Audit one location where personalised communication records are kept. Could another pupil or visitor read them?

IMPLEMENTATION

Roles and responsibilities

Class teacher

Plan accessible participation, confirm a usable route for showing understanding, model universal boards, respond to messages and review adjustments.

Teaching assistant and key adults

Keep AAC available, follow access and support plans, describe successes and communication breakdowns accurately, and avoid becoming the child's "voice" by default.

SENCO / inclusion leader

Coordinate plans and specialist input, support implementation, meet staff training needs, agree reviews and ensure provision is consistent across lessons, trips and transitions.

Speech and language therapist / AAC team

Where involved, lead or advise on communication assessment, vocabulary and access-system decisions; support staff and family partner training.

Pupil and family

Pupil expertise is central. Families can share recognised signals, language/cultural needs, preferences and communication successes; always distinguish their perspective from the child's own expressed view.

Designated safeguarding lead

Lead safeguarding responses and secure records in line with current policy. The My Voice Toolkit must not create a parallel reporting system.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Nominate a named lead to check board access and staff competence every half-term.

IMPLEMENTATION

The My Voice six-step cycle

A repeatable process for any classroom, assembly, club, corridor or school trip.

1 NOTICE

Observe the pupil’s existing signals and ask how they prefer to communicate - without treating every movement as a message.

2 OFFER

Provide the child’s established device, signing, writing, board or other accessible route, with space for an alternative response.

3 WAIT

Pause and allow enough processing and motor access time. Resist repeating or simplifying without checking.

4 CHECK

If needed, gently confirm interpretation with yes/no, “something else” or the person’s preferred repair method.

5 RESPOND

Show what changes as a result of the message. If something cannot happen, explain what can and why.

6 REVIEW

Ask the pupil whether the method worked and note barriers. Adapt with family and specialists when appropriate.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Track “message understood and acted on”, not simply the number of times a pupil uses the board.

IMPLEMENTATION

A whole-class approach without spotlighting pupils

Universal participation options

- Allow pointing, writing, verbal answers, key words, voting, post-it notes, gestures and AAC for class questions.
- Post an accessible help/stop/need-more-time board at a height pupils can reach.
- Allow pupils to choose how to answer when learning objectives do not specifically require speech.
- Teach all pupils to wait, check and accept different communication methods.

Avoid performative inclusion

Do not ask a disabled pupil to demonstrate their AAC in front of the class or explain a diagnosis. Do not make personalised regulation, health or safeguarding boards public.

Low-effort modifications

- Preview key vocabulary and lesson changes.
- Use written instructions alongside speech.
- Offer a nonverbal exit or help signal agreed in advance.
- Give predictable opportunities to communicate ideas and preferences.

Pupil agency

Invite opt-in use; if a pupil declines a particular board, investigate whether it is inaccessible, too childish, overly visible, confusing or simply not useful.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Redesign one existing lesson task so at least three response modes are possible.

PATHWAYS

Primary: ages approximately 4-11

Use age-appropriate visuals and play-based opportunities without assuming a pupil's understanding from their reading level.

Core starting set

P02 Core Messages + P03 Everyday Needs + P06 Boundaries, with the child's familiar symbols or photos where appropriate.

What a 15-minute lesson might look like

- Welcome (2 min): show the child how they can say yes, no, wait or other.
- Model (3 min): an adult uses a choice to genuinely change the activity.
- Activity (7 min): puppet/character says "stop" or "help" and adult responds.
- Reflect (3 min): children show how an adult should acknowledge a message.

Example language

"Your voice can be words, signs, pictures, movement, writing or your device. Every way deserves listening."

Keep it genuine

Never deliberately withhold basic support to "create an opportunity" for a communication response. Embed modelling in natural routines and interaction.

Evidence of learning

Record whether children had an accessible route to communicate and whether an adult responded; avoid scoring "obedience" or "appropriate emotions".

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Adapt the communication cards to the child's established representation and home language where possible.

PATHWAYS

Primary: three worked school moments

Moment A - carpet time

A child turns away when the group becomes noisy. Adult quietly offers a familiar “quiet” or “different place” option without making it a public discussion. If chosen, adult follows through and reviews how to reduce noise next time.

Moment B - change to timetable

An assembly replaces PE. Adult indicates “change” and shows what will happen first/next. Pupil can select “I need more time” or ask for the written plan. Adult confirms the new routine.

Moment C - peer interaction

A pupil says “stop” with gesture during play. Adults model peers recognising “stop” and invite a different game if welcomed; they do not insist on participation or forced reconciliation.

Teacher prompts

- “Would you like me to show or tell you?”
- “I’ll wait for you.”
- “I heard you say no. Here are the safe choices.”
- “You can tell me another way.”

Differentiation

Provide real objects, two large high-contrast choices or spoken scanning only when matched to the child’s individual access route; offer more vocabulary for pupils wanting to elaborate.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Keep adult scripts consistent across classroom, playground and lunchtime.

PATHWAYS

Secondary: privacy, identity and dignity

For pupils aged approximately 11-18, a discreet interface and adult-respectful language are essential.

Core starting set

P15 Discreet Pocket Strip; P09 Learning and Questions; P12 Change and Transition; a private version of P06 Boundaries.

Secondary-specific priorities

- Negotiating help without public attention.
- Explaining task ambiguity, sensory overload and assessment needs.
- Expressing disagreement without being characterised as defiance.
- Maintaining peer autonomy, privacy and age-appropriate topics.
- Providing options for online/text-based communication and planned conversations.

Sample teacher language

“If answering aloud doesn’t work today, you can type, write, use your device or show me a response privately.”

Avoid

Infantile imagery, public “feelings charts” with names, compulsory check-ins, making pupils disclose private diagnoses to classmates, or speaking to older pupils as if they were very young.

Progress indicator

Did the young person gain a way to influence the lesson, support needed and next action?

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Ask teenagers what would make a communication support discreet enough that they would actually use it.

PATHWAYS

Secondary: three worked school moments

Moment A - a crowded corridor

A student indicates “need space”. Staff offer an agreed alternative route or staggered transition where feasible. They later ask whether it helped rather than describing the avoidance as failure.

Moment B - an oral presentation

Where speech is not the learning objective, a student submits a typed or device-supported explanation. Staff assess the intended learning rather than penalising the chosen response format.

Moment C - a changed exam room

The student receives accessible advance information, with a named contact and a way to say “something is different” and “I need clarification”. Appropriate exam access arrangements follow separate rules.

Participation in PSHE and relationships learning

Make refusal, consent, personal boundaries, safe help-seeking and privacy vocabulary available. Avoid forcing personal disclosure in front of peers.

Student-led adaptation

Invite the young person to select size, wording, colours, device or paper format, and who can see their personal communication plan.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Co-produce a discreet support card with one secondary pupil; allow them to reject any wording.

PATHWAYS

Complex communication needs: start with competence

Non-speaking does not mean non-thinking. Do not confuse observed access limits with what a pupil knows or wants.

First establish the existing system

- Read the current communication passport, EHCP provision, SLT/AAC recommendations and access plans.
- Ask the pupil and family about reliable and unreliable response signals; check assumptions through observation.
- Confirm positioning, visual and hearing needs, fatigue, movement and backup access methods.
- Keep core vocabulary available all day, including during personal care, breaks and changes.

Model, do not demand

An adult can demonstrate communication while sharing a real activity, then wait. The pupil may respond, watch, use another method or decline. These are not graded as success/failure.

Partner-assisted scanning cautions

Requires a reliable agreed selection signal, consistent pacing and neutral wording. Do not assume an “eye flick”, silence or movement means YES without individual assessment.

Multiple sensory routes

For some pupils, meaningful objects, tactile cues, auditory choices or access switches may be more appropriate than flat pictures. These need individual co-design with specialists.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | At the start of every activity, check “Does the pupil have a reliable way to start, stop, refuse and repair?”

PATHWAYS

Complex communication: example interaction

Situation

A pupil with limited voluntary hand movement appears uncomfortable during an art activity. They have an established yes/no switch routine and use a communication book with partner support.

Adult approach

- Pause the task and make the pupil’s established access system usable.
- Say: “I can see this may not be working. I am going to offer choices the usual way.”
- Offer only the agreed options, with the agreed timing; include “none / other”.
- Check the selection without repeating it until the adult obtains a desired answer.
- Respond to the selected need and document an access barrier if any.

Incorrect approach

Adult moves the child’s hand onto a symbol or interprets a single movement as “yes” without checking, then records “pupil chose to continue”.

Potential next actions

If the pupil indicates physical pain, follow the care or medical pathway. If they indicate “stop”, pause and adapt. If there is no reliable access, stop guessing and consult staff who know their communication method.

Success means

The child had an accessible opportunity to influence what happened. It does not depend on using the particular My Voice board.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Practise with the pupil’s actual agreed access plan - not an improvised substitute.

PATHWAYS

Intersectional needs and flexible access

Language and culture

Offer the child’s home language, preferred wording, translation support and culturally familiar imagery where possible. Do not assume English literacy, symbols or gestures have identical meaning for everyone.

Sensory profiles

Some pupils prefer low visual clutter; others benefit from clear images or colour groups. Check glare, contrast, lighting, sound output and tactile alternatives.

Motor and fatigue needs

A pupil may have reliable access at one time of day but not another. Agree an alternative route that remains available even when tired, in pain or distressed.

Literacy differences

Text-first templates in this toolkit are starting structures; add photos, objects, existing symbols, audio or larger print based on need. Do not assume reading is required to communicate.

Trauma and relationship safety

Choice-making must be real, not coercive. Be alert that public prompts, forced disclosure, touch or repeated questioning can increase distress.

Identity and privacy

Respect pupil pronouns, preferred names and neurodiversity language. Ask about privacy rather than automatically sharing personal information with peers or all staff.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | At the next review ask: “Which parts of our system exclude this child when conditions change?”

READY-TO-TEACH / LESSON 1

Every way counts

Children learn that communication is bigger than speech.

Suggested 20-minute teaching sequence

- 5 min - Show or describe four examples: spoken answer, written note, sign/gesture, AAC message.
- 8 min - Pupils choose a method to tell a partner their favourite activity or decline to answer.
- 7 min - Adult models listening, waiting and checking, then celebrates successful understanding rather than speech.

Materials

A pupil-approved communication option; appropriate board or existing AAC system; optional visual timetable; scenario cards.

Differentiation

Primary: use familiar classroom objects or character cards. Secondary: analyse a school scenario where speech is assumed. Complex needs: present through established AAC/objects; participation may be watching, selecting or rejecting.

Assessment for learning

Ask: “Did everyone have a meaningful way to contribute?”

Follow-through

Repeat the communication opportunity in an authentic routine within the week, and record how adults responded.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Tell pupils explicitly that they may opt out, ask for a break, or use any accessible response route.

READY-TO-TEACH / LESSON 2

Yes, no, not sure - and something else

Pupils practise choice, refusal and uncertainty with real outcomes.

Suggested 20-minute teaching sequence

- 4 min - Adult models NO and NOT SURE and honours both.
- 10 min - Offer genuinely available low-stakes choices, including “none” and “other”.
- 6 min - Reflect: how do adults show that a refusal has been heard?

Materials

A pupil-approved communication option; appropriate board or existing AAC system; optional visual timetable; scenario cards.

Differentiation

Primary: choice of activity or story. Secondary: choose feedback format or discussion topic. Complex needs: follow existing reliable yes/no signal and provide time; no forced trials.

Assessment for learning

Count adult responses to messages, not number of “correct” responses.

Follow-through

Repeat the communication opportunity in an authentic routine within the week, and record how adults responded.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Tell pupils explicitly that they may opt out, ask for a break, or use any accessible response route.

READY-TO-TEACH / LESSON 3

A Wave can be a message

Notice sensory or emotional needs without forcing self-disclosure.

Suggested 20-minute teaching sequence

- 5 min - Use fictional characters with different experiences of noise, change and calm.
- 10 min - Offer possible adjustments (quiet, movement, break, explanation); let pupils suggest others.
- 5 min - Pupils identify how a character could request support.

Materials

A pupil-approved communication option; appropriate board or existing AAC system; optional visual timetable; scenario cards.

Differentiation

Primary: colour-neutral pictures with optional emotion words. Secondary: class-based scenario analysis, no compulsory feelings ratings. Complex needs: sensory preferences observed and confirmed through the pupil’s access method.

Assessment for learning

Check whether chosen adjustments actually become available.

Follow-through

Repeat the communication opportunity in an authentic routine within the week, and record how adults responded.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Tell pupils explicitly that they may opt out, ask for a break, or use any accessible response route.

READY-TO-TEACH / LESSON 4

Circles help me prepare

Pupils learn how to request information and support when routines change.

Suggested 20-minute teaching sequence

- 5 min - Show a simple before/after timetable change.
- 8 min - Practise “what next”, “wait”, “show me”, “different plan” messages.
- 7 min - Co-design an accessible change notice for the classroom.

Materials

A pupil-approved communication option; appropriate board or existing AAC system; optional visual timetable; scenario cards.

Differentiation

Primary: now/next cards. Secondary: discreet digital or written schedules. Complex needs: follow an established object or auditory cue transition routine.

Assessment for learning

Ask which advance notice reduced confusion and which did not.

Follow-through

Repeat the communication opportunity in an authentic routine within the week, and record how adults responded.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Tell pupils explicitly that they may opt out, ask for a break, or use any accessible response route.

READY-TO-TEACH / LESSON 5

Bridges mean listening both ways

Peers learn active listening, boundaries and repair.

Suggested 20-minute teaching sequence

- 5 min - Role-play an adult misunderstanding a simple message.
- 10 min - Practise “I think you meant... is that right?” and accept “no/other”.
- 5 min - Agree class habits: pause, listen, check, respond.

Materials

A pupil-approved communication option; appropriate board or existing AAC system; optional visual timetable; scenario cards.

Differentiation

Primary: puppets or familiar stories. Secondary: peer group and online messaging examples. Complex needs: partners practise alongside the pupil’s established communication system.

Assessment for learning

Notice whether children retain control of their own message.

Follow-through

Repeat the communication opportunity in an authentic routine within the week, and record how adults responded.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Tell pupils explicitly that they may opt out, ask for a break, or use any accessible response route.

READY-TO-TEACH / LESSON 6

My communication, my next step

Bring Brian’s, Waves, Circles and Bridges into a real school routine.

Suggested 20-minute teaching sequence

- 5 min - Pupil selects a routine that matters (lunch, entering class, reading, transition).
- 10 min - Plan available messages, adult response and environment adjustment.
- 5 min - Decide how to review it with the pupil using accessible feedback.

Materials

A pupil-approved communication option; appropriate board or existing AAC system; optional visual timetable; scenario cards.

Differentiation

Primary: choose with drawings/objects. Secondary: discreet learner-led plan. Complex needs: co-produce with established team and pupil signals, with no guessed choices.

Assessment for learning

A completed plan is not success until it works for the pupil in the real routine.

Follow-through

Repeat the communication opportunity in an authentic routine within the week, and record how adults responded.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Tell pupils explicitly that they may opt out, ask for a break, or use any accessible response route.

FICTIONAL CASE STUDY

Case 1 - Amira, Year 2: the noisy lunch hall

These are invented training scenarios. They are not records of real children.

Starting point

Amira communicates with speech sometimes but stops speaking when overwhelmed. Lunchtime staff previously described her silence as refusal to cooperate.

Four Pillars-informed response

Before lunch, the teacher offers a visual lunch routine and a discreet “quiet / break / go with adult” option. Staff allow time, honour the chosen option and check later whether it helped.

Professional caution

Check that nobody requires speech before permitting basic support; coordinate with midday supervisors.

Discussion prompt

What was the environmental barrier? How do we hear Amira without putting her on display?

Useful printable resources

Select from the P-series using the pupil’s existing access plan rather than issuing every sheet.

Debrief

Name one barrier that adults can change, one way pupil choice can shape the plan, and one thing that should be reviewed after a week.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | A successful outcome is safer access and an acknowledged message - not forced use of a particular tool.

FICTIONAL CASE STUDY

Case 2 - Finley, Year 5: change of plan

These are invented training scenarios. They are not records of real children.

Starting point

Finley relies on familiar routines and becomes distressed when PE moves indoors. Adults repeatedly say, “You know what to do,” but the change is not displayed.

Four Pillars-informed response

Update the now/next view, explain the reason briefly, offer “more time / written plan / quiet route / something else” and review future change notices.

Professional caution

Do not promise that every change can be avoided; increase predictability and options.

Discussion prompt

How could a staff handover prevent repeating the same problem?

Useful printable resources

Select from the P-series using the pupil’s existing access plan rather than issuing every sheet.

Debrief

Name one barrier that adults can change, one way pupil choice can shape the plan, and one thing that should be reviewed after a week.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | A successful outcome is safer access and an acknowledged message - not forced use of a particular tool.

FICTIONAL CASE STUDY

Case 3 - Rowan, Year 9: speaking in class

These are invented training scenarios. They are not records of real children.

Starting point

Rowan knows the content in science but rarely answers verbally. Teachers read the silence as lack of work and ask publicly if help is needed.

Four Pillars-informed response

Student and teacher agree private typed responses, hand-in cards and a learning-support strip. Teacher makes feedback available without drawing attention to Rowan.

Professional caution

Do not assume social anxiety, autism or lack of understanding from silence; assess the intended subject skill.

Discussion prompt

What evidence would show increased access without forcing public speech?

Useful printable resources

Select from the P-series using the pupil's existing access plan rather than issuing every sheet.

Debrief

Name one barrier that adults can change, one way pupil choice can shape the plan, and one thing that should be reviewed after a week.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | A successful outcome is safer access and an acknowledged message - not forced use of a particular tool.

FICTIONAL CASE STUDY

Case 4 - Noor, specialist provision: unreliable pointing

These are invented training scenarios. They are not records of real children.

Starting point

Noor has complex motor needs and uses an established switch-based yes/no routine. A new TA offers a paper board and interprets a movement as yes.

Four Pillars-informed response

Stop assuming. Read the access plan, ask trained staff to model the agreed routine, provide reliable supported access and document the attempted but uncertain message.

Professional caution

Noor is not “non-communicative”; the adult method is the barrier. Do not teach a new unauthorised access system on the spot.

Discussion prompt

What exactly must a supply-teacher handover contain?

Useful printable resources

Select from the P-series using the pupil’s existing access plan rather than issuing every sheet.

Debrief

Name one barrier that adults can change, one way pupil choice can shape the plan, and one thing that should be reviewed after a week.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | A successful outcome is safer access and an acknowledged message - not forced use of a particular tool.

FICTIONAL CASE STUDY

Case 5 - Ellis, Year 7: “not this person”

These are invented training scenarios. They are not records of real children.

Starting point

Ellis uses a discreet message “I need private help” after an interaction in the corridor. The first adult wants to know what happened and starts offering possible explanations.

Four Pillars-informed response

Listen calmly, do not lead, maintain access to the pupil’s message method, record what was communicated and alert the DSL promptly through school safeguarding procedures.

Professional caution

Do not investigate, ask suggestive questions or promise secrecy; follow KCSIE 2026 and school policy.

Discussion prompt

How can a pupil disclose without a forced public conversation?

Useful printable resources

Select from the P-series using the pupil’s existing access plan rather than issuing every sheet.

Debrief

Name one barrier that adults can change, one way pupil choice can shape the plan, and one thing that should be reviewed after a week.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | A successful outcome is safer access and an acknowledged message - not forced use of a particular tool.

FICTIONAL CASE STUDY

Case 6 - Jamie, Year 4: language and identity

These are invented training scenarios. They are not records of real children.

Starting point

Jamie understands classroom content but relies on home-language vocabulary and family-specific gestures in stress. Generic cartoon symbols do not match the child's understanding.

Four Pillars-informed response

Co-produce familiar vocabulary, use agreed photographs or licensed symbols and collaborate with family and relevant SLT advice while keeping the child's own choices central.

Professional caution

Check accessibility across settings and avoid assuming English-only vocabulary reflects ability.

Discussion prompt

Which messages were missing from the generic board?

Useful printable resources

Select from the P-series using the pupil's existing access plan rather than issuing every sheet.

Debrief

Name one barrier that adults can change, one way pupil choice can shape the plan, and one thing that should be reviewed after a week.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | A successful outcome is safer access and an acknowledged message - not forced use of a particular tool.

PRACTICE

Routine matrix: where communication belongs

Arrival and registration

Offer what-next, support, attendance-related concerns and a discreet way to ask for help. Avoid announcing personal feelings publicly.

Subject lessons

Ensure that question, comment, request for explanation, disagreement and need-more-time messages are accessible.

Breaks, lunch and playground

Plan help, peer boundaries, sensory adjustments and safe places. Midday and visiting staff need usable guidance.

Personal care and health

Provide stop, pain, discomfort, explanation and help choices with dignity and the established personal-care plan.

Trips, transport and transitions

Carry backups; agree who manages the device and any batteries, transport, positioning and emergency access.

Assemblies and clubs

Provide space and alternatives to public responding; make start/stop/leave/help vocabulary accessible.

Home-school link

Share agreed adaptations and successes, but never use a routine school diary for safeguarding disclosures.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Use P26 to note the actual communication opportunity, barrier, response and next adjustment.

PRACTICE

Four-week introduction plan

Week 1 - Listen and map

- Audit where pupils cannot say no, help, wait or other.
- Meet pupil, family and SLT/AAC team where applicable.
- Select appropriate pupil-led supports and baseline everyday access.

Week 2 - Teach adults first

- Train staff in partner wait time, checking meaning and safeguarding.
- Place generic universal boards and personalised copies only where appropriate.
- Trial one authentic routine with feedback.

Week 3 - Broaden opportunities

- Offer communication access in lessons, lunch and transitions.
- Model the language without quizzing.
- Record when a message changes adult action.

Week 4 - Review with pupil

- Ask whether the resources work and whether a different format is preferred.
- Review missed messages, access barriers and staff handover.
- Agree next steps and a review date.

How the curriculum connects

Use the existing Four Pillars 12-Week Learning Curriculum for extended teaching. This toolkit supplies additional communication access and practice, not a competing lesson sequence.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Start small and achieve genuine access before asking staff to use more templates.

PRACTICE

15-minute staff briefing

Minutes 0-3: message

Every child has a voice even when speech is absent. Communication must include refusal, questions, commenting and help-seeking.

Minutes 3-6: demonstrate

Show P02 and the pupil's agreed access route, if sharing is authorised. Model WAIT, HELP and SOMETHING ELSE without a test.

Minutes 6-10: paired practice

One adult offers a genuine choice; the other uses silence, a board or a different response mode. Repeat with "I'm not sure."

Minutes 10-13: safeguarding

Practise receiving "I don't feel safe" without leading questions. Ask who the DSL is and how to record the exact message securely.

Minutes 13-15: one commitment

Each staff member names one routine they will change this week, then reviews impact with the pupil and SENCO.

Competency check

- I can name a child's current communication route.
- I can support a refusal and allow processing time.
- I know the DSL reporting route.
- I can tell the difference between what a pupil communicated and my interpretation.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | A 15-minute briefing is an introduction only; it does not certify staff as AAC practitioners.

PRACTICE

How to evaluate ethically

Track access and adult response

- Opportunities: was the agreed communication method available and accessible?
- Choice: did the pupil have an available way to refuse, request help, comment or redirect?
- Response: did an adult acknowledge and act on the message appropriately?
- Repair: was there a chance to correct a misunderstanding?
- Experience: did the pupil report that communication felt easier, safer or more respectful?

Avoid these measures

Do not use compliance rates, forced eye contact, suppression of harmless self-regulation, reduced refusals or “happy face” scores as evidence that communication support works.

Sample review questions

- What message did pupils struggle to express?
- Where was the device or board out of reach?
- Did a pupil reject a board because it was childish, confusing or public?
- Whose views are missing?
- What did adults actually change?

Interpretation

A larger number of requests or refusals may indicate improved access and trust rather than deteriorating behaviour. Make no clinical effectiveness claims from informal school monitoring.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Use P27 pupil feedback and P28 review record to triangulate views without pressuring disclosure.

PRACTICE

Working with parents and carers

Ask practical, non-leading questions

- Which communication methods does your child choose at home?
- What signs suggest they want space, help or a change?
- What messages are easy at home but hard in school?
- Does the child have key words, objects, photographs, signs or a device already in use?
- Is there anything school staff often misunderstand?

Share the important distinction

The pupil’s own expressed view remains central. Family interpretation is valuable context but should not be represented as the pupil’s exact preference without checking.

Who can see what?

Agree a legitimate purpose and appropriate sharing. Medical or safeguarding information may require a different, protected route from ordinary home-school communication.

Bridging differences

Some pupils communicate differently across school and home because of context, fatigue, culture or trust. Avoid treating the difference as proof a parent or member of staff is inaccurate.

Families should know

Generic printed My Voice boards are not a replacement for a specialist AAC system, assessment or existing communication plan.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Invite a parent/carer to identify one useful vocabulary item, then ask the pupil where possible whether it belongs on their board.

PRACTICE

Pupil voice and supported decision-making

Begin with real choices

Offer only options that are genuinely available. Include the option to suggest something else, take time or change a decision.

Limit adult influence

Do not repeatedly rephrase a question until the pupil selects the adult's preferred response. Use balanced wording and the child's usual vocabulary and access method.

When messages conflict

A child might first indicate YES and later STOP. Honour their ability to change their mind. If access reliability is uncertain, document uncertainty and seek relevant specialist support.

Collaborative planning

Let the child select communication topics, card appearance, location and trusted partners as far as possible. Make sure peers do not read private content.

Hard questions

Where significant wellbeing or safeguarding decisions are involved, use professional duties, child-centred statutory processes and qualified assessment rather than drawing conclusions from a single board selection.

Pupil feedback statement

"I want to know whether this helped you communicate - not whether you used the card the way I expected."

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Ask the child which three messages they most want adults to notice.

PRACTICE

Quality assurance for SENCOs and leaders

Environment and availability

- Pupil-approved communication methods available throughout the school day.
- Backup plans for device failure, staff absence and off-site activities.
- Board placement, physical access, sensory and visual adaptations checked.

Staff practice

- Adults allow time and respond to refusal and uncertainty.
- Nobody withholds AAC as a punishment.
- Staff can recognise when an access signal is unreliable and know whom to ask.

Safety and dignity

- Clear safeguarding response, recordkeeping and escalation routes.
- Personal data is appropriately restricted.
- Secondary pupils have age-respectful and discreet options.

Review

- Pupil voice shapes decisions; family and SLT input included as appropriate.
- Change is measured in access, understanding and response, not obedience.
- A named lead and next review date are recorded.

Escalation triggers

Repeated missed messages, suspected inaccessible AAC, health/safeguarding concerns and staff disagreement about communication meaning require prompt coordinated review.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Use this checklist at launch and again at four and twelve weeks.

PRACTICE

Troubleshooting quick guide

“The child never chooses a card”

Do not assume refusal to communicate. Check if the vocabulary matters, layout is accessible, adult response is meaningful, and the board is age-respectful. Offer the established system instead.

“We cannot tell what yes means”

Treat access as uncertain. Do not make high-stakes decisions by guessing; follow the agreed access plan and seek specialist input.

“The child just says no to everything”

Check whether choices are real, demands are accessible, or “no” is the most reliable available language. Extend vocabulary while honouring refusal.

“The board distracts the class”

Try a smaller, discreet or personal format, but do not restrict a pupil’s essential communication. Ask the pupil what they prefer.

“Staff want a colour-coded behaviour score”

A self-reported need is not a disciplinary score. Avoid turning Wave choices into public rankings or compliance targets.

“There is a safeguarding message”

Stop the teaching activity and follow the school’s DSL route. The board is a way to communicate, not an investigation tool.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Where staff disagree, prioritise the child’s communication access and documented specialist advice.

PRACTICE

A pupil-approved one-page plan: worked example

Fictional worked example. Adapt only with a pupil and relevant staff - do not copy into a real child's record.

Preferred methods

Student uses written responses and a discreet pocket strip; can speak with trusted peers but not usually in larger groups.

Core messages needed

Please wait; I need clarification; too loud; different way; not now; I need to talk privately; I have an idea.

Environment adjustments

Teachers provide key instructions in writing and a discreet route to request a break or change seating.

When the message is unclear

Teacher asks privately, "Do you mean X, or something else?" and gives time to answer.

What must not happen

Public pressure to answer, forced eye contact, confiscation of a communication aid, disclosure of private needs on a public display.

Review

Student chooses fortnightly written check-in; SENCO oversees implementation. Staff observe access barriers without interpreting silence as consent.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Keep real records in the school-approved secure system.

PRACTICE

Glossary: useful terms

AAC

Augmentative and alternative communication: approaches and tools to support communication alongside or instead of speech.

Communication partner

A person who communicates with an AAC user and shares responsibility for making interaction accessible.

Aided language modelling

An adult naturally uses the child's communication system while communicating, without requiring imitation.

Core vocabulary

Frequently useful words or messages that allow communication in many situations, such as "more", "stop", "want", "not", "help". Individual systems vary.

Access method

How someone selects or expresses a message, such as touch, gaze, switch, speech, writing or partner-assisted scanning.

Communication breakdown and repair

When meaning is not shared or understood, and participants check, clarify or try another method.

Presume competence

Avoid assuming limited understanding because someone does not use speech or cannot readily show knowledge through typical assessment methods.

Pupil voice

The child or young person's expressed opinions, wishes, experiences and priorities, accessible through their own communication methods.

PRACTICE / REFLECTION | Prefer terms used by the individual child or young person and their family.

RESEARCH AND GOVERNANCE

References and professional guidance

Source material checked on 20 October 2026. Links are included to support schools in verifying current requirements.

[1] Department for Education. Keeping children safe in education 2026 (in force 1 September 2026). https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2

[2] Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care. SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years (England). https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

[3] Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. AAC guidance (updated May 2024). https://www.rcslt.org/members/clinical-guidance/augmentative-and-alternative-communication/augmentative-and-alternative-communication-guidance/

[4] Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. AAC overview for families and non-clinicians. https://www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/clinical-information/augmentative-and-alternative-communication/

[5] Communication Matters. Publications and AAC resources. https://www.communicationmatters.org.uk/publications/

[6] NSPCC Learning. Recognising and responding to child abuse and neglect. https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/recognising-and-responding-to-abuse

[7] Information Commissioner’s Office. A 10 step guide to sharing information to safeguard children (guidance may be under review). https://ico.org.uk/10steps

[8] GOV.UK. Help if you have a disabled child: education and reasonable adjustments. https://www.gov.uk/help-for-disabled-child/education

Evidence positioning

Tom Tom’s Four Pillars is the author’s original educational organisation of concepts. The toolkit integrates selected established AAC, communication, SEND and safeguarding principles, but the combined Four Pillars framework and these specific boards are not independently clinically validated or formally accredited.

Local adaptation

School leaders must check current requirements and policies for their setting, including lawful information sharing, access to specialist services and duty of care. This pack applies to schools in England; other UK nations use different statutory guidance.

CLOSING NOTE

A message from the author

“Being heard” means more than being encouraged to speak. It means that when a child communicates, the adults around them make space to listen - and respond.

The Four Pillars offer a language for making school feel more understandable: Brian’s for the many ways minds work, Waves for experiences that rise and fall, Circles for structure and predictability, and Bridges for connection. My Voice is the practical bridge between a child’s experience and an adult’s response.

No child should have to earn the right to communicate. A pupil should be able to express joy, humour, disagreement, worry, pain and ordinary preferences without being reduced to a behaviour score or a diagnostic label.

I hope this toolkit helps staff replace assumptions with curiosity and routines with responsive relationships. The goal is not to make children fit a single communication style. It is to build school environments where many communication styles are understood.

Counsellor Tomass J. Wood

Creator of the Tom Tom Universe and the Four Pillars educational approach.

School-ready educational resource - for adaptation with pupils, families, education teams and relevant clinical professionals. 2026 edition.

My communication profile

Complete with the pupil. Store securely; this is not a public classroom display.

My preferred name / how I want adults to address me

How I communicate best (speech, AAC, signs, writing, objects, etc.)

How I say YES / NO / WAIT / STOP (only if reliable)

What helps adults understand me

What adults should avoid

PERSONAL RECORD: Share only with authorised staff who need it. Check with the pupil and existing AAC/SLT plan.

Core messages

Use the pupil’s chosen access method. These are not tests or commands.

YES	NO	NOT SURE
WAIT	MORE	STOP
HELP	SOMETHING ELSE	AGAIN
FINISHED	CHANGE	PLEASE LISTEN

Everyday needs

Make the child’s agreed healthcare, toileting and communication support available.

DRINK	FOOD	TOILET	REST
BREAK	SPACE	QUIET	MOVE
TOO HOT	TOO COLD	PAIN	FEEL SICK
MY DEVICE	SOMEONE	NOT SURE	SOMETHING ELSE

My Wave, my choice

No child has to choose a feeling. Ask what support would help.

I FEEL OK	I AM UNSURE	TOO MUCH
I FEEL CALM	I NEED QUIET	I NEED SPACE
I NEED HELP	I NEED TIME	NOT NOW
DIFFERENT WAY	I CAN CONTINUE	SOMETHING ELSE

Never use selections to publicly rank emotions, score behaviour or require an explanation.

Body and comfort

A communication prompt, not a medical assessment.

HEAD	EARS	THROAT
TUMMY	ARM / HAND	LEG / FOOT
BACK	DIZZY	SICK
HURTS	I NEED FIRST AID	SOMETHING ELSE

Follow school first-aid, health and safeguarding procedures. Do not diagnose or lead a child’s account.

My boundaries

Support ordinary choices, personal boundaries and consent; explain unavoidable safety limits.

NO	STOP	NOT NOW
PLEASE ASK FIRST	MORE SPACE	NO TOUCH
I CHANGED MY MIND	I WANT TO LEAVE	I WANT A DIFFERENT ADULT
PLEASE EXPLAIN	I NEED TIME	SOMETHING ELSE

Getting safe help

For safe help-seeking. Do not use to elicit, script or investigate disclosures.

I NEED HELP	I DO NOT FEEL SAFE	I NEED PRIVATE HELP
I WANT TO TELL SOMEONE	NOT THIS PERSON	PLEASE LISTEN
I CAN WRITE IT	WAIT	I AM NOT READY
SOMETHING ELSE	I NEED MY DEVICE	I NEED A SAFE PLACE

If a child communicates a safeguarding concern, listen calmly, record exactly and report to the DSL promptly.

People and places

Personalise labels and photographs with the pupil. Do not display private named contacts.

MY TEACHER	SENCO	TRUSTED ADULT
FRIEND	FAMILY MEMBER	CLASSROOM
QUIET SPACE	MEDICAL ROOM	OTHER PERSON
OTHER PLACE	NOT THIS PERSON	SOMETHING ELSE

Learning and questions

Every pupil needs a way to ask, comment and correct misunderstandings.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND	PLEASE EXPLAIN	SHOW ME
WRITE IT	SLOW DOWN	I KNOW THIS
MORE TIME	CAN I TRY?	I HAVE AN IDEA
HELP ME START	CHECK MY WORK	SOMETHING ELSE

Sensory support

Options need to be genuinely available and tailored to the pupil’s preferences.

LESS NOISE	LESS LIGHT	MORE SPACE
NO TOUCH	MOVEMENT	QUIET PLACE
HEADPHONES	A BREAK	CHANGE SEAT
MORE TIME	I NEED HELP	SOMETHING ELSE

Ways I communicate

More than one method may be used. Do not treat this sheet as an access assessment.

SPEAKING	WRITING	TYPING
MY AAC DEVICE	PICTURES	SIGNS
GESTURES	POINTING	EYE GAZE
OBJECTS	SWITCH / SCAN	SOMETHING ELSE

Change and transition

Support Circles with accessible notice, predictable routines and real adjustments.

WHAT NEXT?	**SHOW TIMETABLE**	**CHANGE OF PLAN**
TELL ME BEFORE	**MORE TIME**	**QUIETER ROUTE**
GO WITH SOMEONE	**NOT READY**	**EXPLAIN AGAIN**
I NEED A BREAK	**DIFFERENT WAY**	**SOMETHING ELSE**

My two choices

Large-print choice strip - use only if the pupil has a reliable way to select.

YES

NO

More than yes or no

Uncertainty and alternatives are essential, not optional.

YES

NO

NOT SURE

SOMETHING ELSE

Discreet secondary strip

Age-respectful messages. Cut out, fold or keep on a device when appropriate.

NEED MORE TIME

PLEASE WRITE IT

NEED A BREAK

CAN WE TALK PRIVATELY?

NOT SURE

SOMETHING ELSE

Conversation mat

Supports a real conversation. The pupil may lead, pause, reject or change a topic.

TOPIC / THING I WANT TO SAY

HOW I WANT TO ANSWER

- **MY WORDS**
- **DRAW / WRITE**
- **MY AAC**
- **OTHER WAY**

DID THE ADULT LISTEN? YES / NO / NOT SURE

SHOULD WE TALK MORE? YES / NO / LATER

Partner-assisted scanning

Staff reference only: follow the pupil’s established individual access and timing plan.

1 Confirm reliable access

Establish the agreed response signal and positioning from the pupil’s existing plan.

2 Set the choices

Use balanced options, including none / other where possible. Avoid leading or false choices.

3 Present steadily

Speak or show one choice at a time in the agreed order and at the agreed pace.

4 Allow time

Wait the agreed response interval. Do not fill silence with extra suggestions.

5 Check meaning

Confirm the selected message through the pupil’s agreed repair routine.

6 Respond / record

Act on the message; note any ambiguity. Do not treat an unclear movement as a confirmed choice.

Do not invent or assume a yes/no signal. Obtain specialist guidance if selection is not reliable.

Practice access board

FOR TRAINING ONLY: test physical layout and access with specialists before pupil use.

YES

NO

WAIT

OTHER

No eye-gaze, switch or scanning method should be inferred from a single choice on this page.

Objects of reference plan

Co-design with pupil and relevant specialists; use meaningful objects only.

Context or activity to be represented

Object cue chosen and its agreed meaning

How the pupil accesses or recognises it

How adult checks understanding

Consent / pupil response / next review

Not all pupils benefit from objects of reference. Do not replace an effective existing AAC system.

Who listens to me?

Private pupil-led list of trusted adults and preferred communication routes.

People I choose to help me communicate

How I get their attention

How I can ask for help privately

If the first person is not available

What I want adults to know

PERSONAL RECORD: keep confidential. Do not share with individuals named in a safeguarding concern.

Blank communication grid

Replace each cell with agreed pupil-owned vocabulary, symbol, photo or text; avoid altering learnt AAC layouts.

ADD A MESSAGE	ADD A MESSAGE	ADD A MESSAGE
ADD A MESSAGE	ADD A MESSAGE	ADD A MESSAGE
ADD A MESSAGE	ADD A MESSAGE	ADD A MESSAGE
ADD A MESSAGE	ADD A MESSAGE	ADD A MESSAGE

Template only. Confirm access and vocabulary with the pupil and relevant AAC/SLT team before use.

My vocabulary priorities

Listen to the pupil: messages need to be useful to them, not only convenient for adults.

Things I want to say about myself

Things I want to say to friends

Things I need to say in lessons

Things I need to say when something is wrong

Little words, big messages

Starter modelling vocabulary, not a replacement for an established core vocabulary layout.

I	YOU	WANT
NOT	MORE	STOP
HELP	GO	LIKE
DON’T LIKE	WHAT?	OTHER

Listening desk card

A quick adult reminder; never use this as a pupil behaviour score.

01 NOTICE

Look for the child’s own signals; do not invent meanings.

02 OFFER

Make their agreed communication method reachable.

03 WAIT

Allow processing and access time.

04 CHECK

Verify uncertainty neutrally; accept correction.

05 RESPOND

Acknowledge and take meaningful action.

06 REVIEW

Ask whether communication worked for the pupil.

Home-school communication

For routine successes and access needs - not safeguarding or other sensitive disclosures.

Date / agreed audience

What communication route worked today

What the pupil wanted adults to understand

What adults changed or will try next

Family feedback or additional context

School policy controls sharing. Record child-protection concerns in the designated safeguarding system.

Communication opportunity log

Record observation and response, not a guessed feeling or behaviour score.

Date / setting / lesson or routine

Agreed access method available? What was the barrier?

Child’s exact message or observable selection (mark uncertainty)

Adult response / adjustment made

Child’s view of whether it helped / follow-up

Treat named or sensitive logs as confidential school records. A single response may be ambiguous.

Did you feel heard?

Optional pupil feedback. A pupil can decline and is not asked to explain a feeling.

YES

NO

NOT SURE

SOMETIMES

I NEED TIME

SOMETHING ELSE

My Voice review meeting

Complete with accessible pupil input; align with existing SEN plans and review cycles.

What messages and access routes are working?

What does the pupil want changed?

Pupil / family / staff / specialist perspectives (identify source)

Actions, named owners and review date

How the pupil can disagree or amend this record

Do not replace the pupil’s EHCP, clinical AAC plan or statutory SEND review.

Outside the classroom

For play, clubs, lunchtime and free time. Honour social boundaries and break choices.

I WANT TO PLAY	I NEED SPACE	JOIN ME?
STOP PLEASE	I NEED HELP	TOO NOISY
QUIET ACTIVITY	DIFFERENT GAME	I WANT TO LEAVE
NOT SURE	A FRIEND	SOMETHING ELSE

Safeguarding response

Adult reference: respond to the pupil’s message, not to a guessed story.

STAY CALM

Listen and acknowledge. Keep the pupil’s AAC or other communication available.

KEEP SAFE

Follow immediate danger / emergency policy if needed.

DO NOT LEAD

No repeated questioning, investigation, promises of secrecy or suggestive prompts.

RECORD EXACTLY

Note words, symbols, order, gestures and context; separate fact from interpretation.

REPORT

Notify DSL promptly via school procedure and follow their direction.

EXPLAIN

Tell the child, accessibly, who needs to know and what happens next.

Current local policies and KCSIE 2026 take precedence. All staff must read Part One of KCSIE.

Access and backup plan

Complete with pupil and professionals where relevant; essential when devices are unavailable.

Primary communication system, location and access method

How the pupil signals stop / no / help / repair

Backup route if system fails or battery is low

Who can support setup, mounting or charging

How to review reliability and adult understanding

Do not substitute an unvalidated yes/no method or change an AAC layout without specialist advice.

I can change my mind

Messages may change. An earlier answer is not permission to ignore a later refusal.

YES

NO

LATER

NOT SURE

I CHANGED MY MIND

SOMETHING ELSE

Picture starter: needs

Original line illustrations paired with words; not a standard AAC symbol library.



DRINK



FOOD



TOILET



STOP



HELP



QUIET



BREAK



OTHER

STARTER ICONS ONLY: These pictures have not been validated for any child. Match to familiar symbols, photographs or an existing AAC system.

Picture starter: choices

A picture-supported sample to personalise, not an assessment of communication ability.



YES



NO



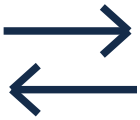
WAIT



MORE



FINISHED



CHANGE



AGAIN



SPACE

STARTER ICONS ONLY: These pictures have not been validated for any child. Match to familiar symbols, photographs or an existing AAC system.