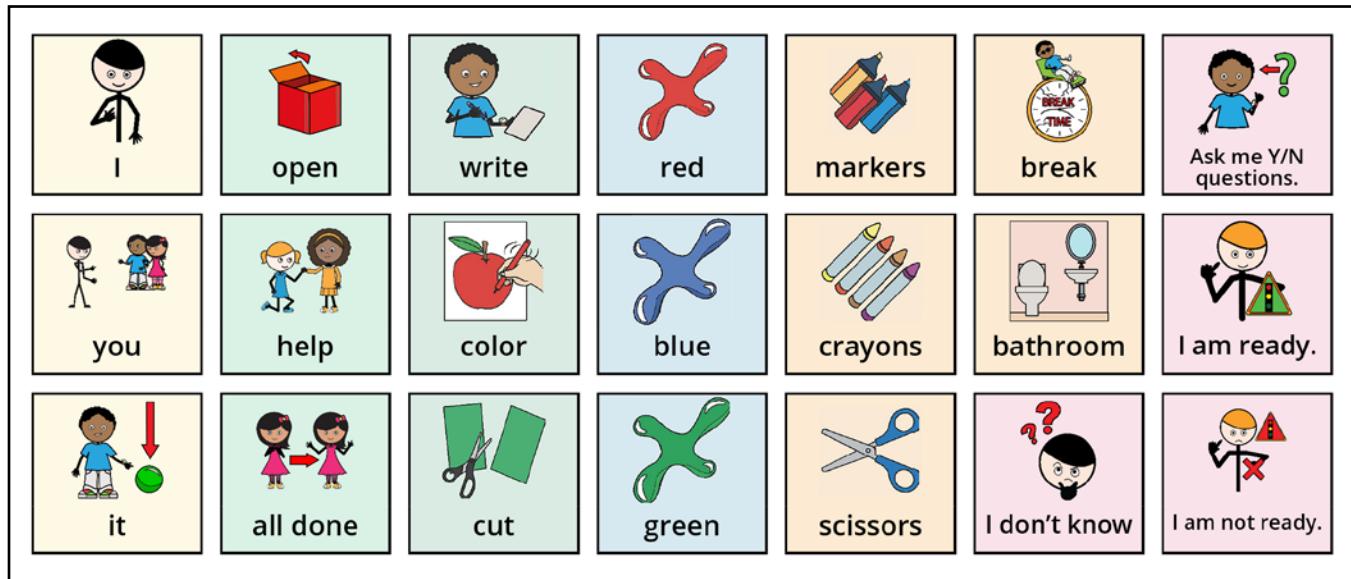


Autism and Communication

COMMUNICATION BOARDS



WHAT ARE COMMUNICATION BOARDS?

Communication boards are a rapid access or paper-based type of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) that can help many individuals, especially autistic students, communicate more effectively. Communication boards do not need electricity or batteries and can be used quickly across settings.

Communication boards are often paper-based and use a variety of symbols (e.g., objects, photographs, line drawings). Symbols are selected based on individual needs and preferences. Symbols should represent core vocabulary (i.e., commonly used words)

and fringe vocabulary (i.e., context-specific words) useful for communicating a variety of messages.

Communication boards can be used in a variety of ways, including a larger board for the whole class to use, multiple boards available for anyone to use in different areas of the classroom, and individualized communication boards for specific students.

Many students who use AAC require multiple ways to communicate throughout their day. Therefore, communication boards should be used in combination with additional types of AAC. To learn more about AAC systems, review our tipsheet [here](#).

Hear from a self-advocate:

"I use spoken words to communicate, so people often assume I don't need alternative methods. However, I don't always have access to my spoken words. Sometimes, especially during times of dysregulation, the pathway that carries spoken words from my brain to my mouth becomes blocked. When this happens, I get stuck. In those moments, having multiple communication options such as communication boards and other forms of AAC is beneficial, supportive, and effective."

-Chloe Rothschild, Educational Consultant

WHY SHOULD I USE COMMUNICATION BOARDS?

There are many ways to share and express ideas. It is important to honor all forms of communication so that students are not excluded. Communication boards can help in many different situations. It gives a visual presentation of the students' options, which can be helpful when students are struggling to come up with their own words.

Giving students multiple ways to communicate helps them practice acceptance and gives all students a chance to participate. Even if it does not seem necessary, communication boards help all students.

HOW DO I USE COMMUNICATION BOARDS?

1. Ensure access.

Provide students with consistent access to the communication boards. Start by including familiar vocabulary. Place them in locations where all students can easily access throughout the day.

2. Model and encourage use.

Demonstrate how to use the board throughout the day. Point to words and phrases on the communication board while you speak.

Continue to model, even if students don't respond right away. Set up opportunities to practice using the communication board in various settings with a variety of people. Encourage students to use the communication board when presented with an opportunity to interact with others. Give them time, practice, and repeated exposure to build familiarity with the AAC tool.

USING COMMUNICATION BOARDS IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS

| Art class | Music class | English language arts | Play or leisure |
|---|--|--|--|
|  <p>Model pointing to symbols on the communication board as students work on projects (e.g., "draw on paper").</p> |  <p>Listen to music and model AAC by pointing to symbols on the communication board while saying, "I hear drums."</p> |  <p>Describe what the book characters are doing using words on the communication board (e.g., "go, in, open").</p> |  <p>Model pointing to symbols on the communication board to express likes or dislikes (e.g., "I like/ don't like swing").</p> |

3. Respond and reinforce.

Acknowledge and reinforce student use of the board immediately. Offer meaningful feedback. For instance, if a student selects loud, say, "It is *loud*—let's turn it down" while pointing to the "turn it down" symbol. Reinforce communication to encourage future use and help students understand that their efforts are effective and rewarding.

WHEN AND WHERE DO I USE COMMUNICATION BOARDS?

Communication boards can be available *whenever* and *wherever* students communicate. It is essential that students have access to some form of communication in *all* educational settings. Communication boards can be made portable so that students have access across a variety of settings.

Having access to a way to express thoughts and relay messages is *essential* for establishing a connection and building trust between the speaker and the listener. It also allows students to advocate, regulate, and participate more fully in their educational environment.

They can also be used in a crisis. Students may struggle with regulating their bodies and their emotions when they are overwhelmed. Asking them to use vocal communication at these times may make things more difficult for everyone. A communication board allows students to express themselves without disrupting their self-regulation. For more information regarding regulation and guidelines for AAC access, please review our tipsheet [here](#).

WHAT ARE MY NEXT STEPS?

COMMUNICATION BOARD LIBRARY

Click [here](#) to explore the TRIAD Communication Board Library.

The online library includes a variety of communication boards that can be downloaded and used with students.

ASSEMBLY TIPS

1. Print multiple copies of the communication boards.
2. Add a protective layer for stability and durability (e.g., page protector, laminate, contact paper).
3. Place the communication boards in multiple places (e.g., communication binder, centers or stations in the classroom, related arts classrooms, nurse's station).

ADDITIONAL AAC RESOURCES

- » [Assistive Technology Project for Education](#)
- » [AAC online module](#)
- » [AAC and Autism: A Guide for Educators](#)
- » [AAC and Restraint and Isolation](#)
- » [Choice Boards: An Overview](#)
- » [Conversation Boards: An Overview for Educators](#)
- » [Conversation Folder for Educators](#)

Communication Board



School Communication Board



Home Communication Board



Playground Communication Board



Community Communication Board



Emotions Communication Board

