

# Access to Justice

For people with communication disabilities



## Etiquette for Communicating with a Person who uses AAC

The basis of good communication includes a respectful attitude and active listening. These basic skills are more important than ever when communicating with a person who has a communication disability for a number of reasons. These disabilities are typically not understood well by the public. People with communication disabilities may require the person with whom they are communicating to use strategies with which that person may not be familiar.

In addition to being a good communicator, there are a number of practical things legal professionals can do to ensure successful interactions in legal settings with people who have communication disabilities.

Everyone communicates differently, so it is important to ask the individual what he/she wants/needs you to do when communicating with them.

The following generic communication strategies are provided as a guide only:

- Speak directly to the person (not to the communication assistant), using a respectful tone and manner;
- Speak at your normal volume and pace, unless you are asked to speak differently;
- Use everyday vocabulary;

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- Avoid using jargon;
- Ask the person how he/she says Yes and No;
- Ask the person to show you how he/she communicates;
- Ask the person what you can do to facilitate smooth communication;
- Give the person opportunities to communicate. Do not feel you have to do all the talking;
- Tell the person if you have not understood what he/she is telling you;
- Allow for extra time for communicating as it takes longer using AAC;
- If available, find a quiet room as this will make it easier to concentrate on what the person is communicating and to protect his / her privacy if using a speech-generating device;
- Do not ask the person to explain how his/her device works, touch the communication device or examine what vocabulary is on the display, unless the person invites you to do so;
- While asking Yes / No questions are sometimes fastest, they are the most restrictive. Be sure to also ask open-ended questions;
- Ensure that person has his / her communication display or device so he/she can

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answer your questions comprehensively;

- Wait for the person to finish what he/she is saying (you can make notes to help you remember). Ask clarifying questions when he/she is finished if you aren't sure you understand correctly.
- When the person has finished, repeat back what you have understood him/her to have said. Ask if you have got it right, and if there is more you need to know.