AUGMENTATIVE OR ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS (AAC) POLICY

Definitions:

- Communication is a basic human right. Communication means to be able to say, 'what I want to say, when I want to say it, to whomever I want' (Gayle Porter, PODD creator). Communication is **not** merely **choice making** or a **yes/no response**.
- The term augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) refers to a system of communication for individuals whose primary method of communication is not speech. AAC ranges from gesture, sign language, facial expression, picture symbols and even dynamic and complex computerized systems (S. Glennen, 1997).
- *Communicative Competence* is defined as linguistic, operational, social and strategic competence (J. Light & D McNaughton, 2014).

Rationale:

- Every student at our school has the right to communicate. This is intrinsic to student well-being and participation.
- Yarra Ranges SDS has the responsibility to provide every student, who requires a communication system, with a functional and realistic AAC system.
- AAC systems are implemented through a **team** approach, comprised of the Student, Speech Pathologist, Classroom Teacher, Parent/s and when appropriate, other therapists, external therapists and carers. This team should be led by the Speech Pathologist. However, a student's communicative competency is the joint responsibility of all members of the team.
- The issuing Speech Pathologist is required to create, order, program, modify and train the members of the team, as well as the student, to use their communication system with competence in all environments.
- Additionally, the Speech Pathologists are required to ensure that the student is supported to use their communication system as they move through the school.

Aims:

- To provide a functional communication system for students whose primary method of communication is nonverbal or requires augmentation.
- To provide ongoing support, training and intervention to develop communicative competence for individuals with AAC.
- To ensure the team obtains extensive and ongoing support and training to use the AAC system in all environments. This includes continued training to ensure that every skill level required for communicative competence is targeted.
- To ensure **consistent** and ongoing use and modelling of AAC systems for all students requiring an AAC occurs across all environments, including at home, at school and in the community.
- To provide and ensure **consistent** symbols and visuals are used across all environments including at school and at home.
- To provide ongoing AAC assessment and to develop clinically meaningful and measurable baselines, goals and outcomes.
- If required, the formal assessment tools to be used at Yarra Ranges SDS are;
  - The Augmentative and Alternative Communication Profile (Kovach, 2009)
  - The Triple C-Checklist of Communicative Competencies
  - The Communication Matrix (Charity Rowland, 1990, 1996, 2011- online).
  - *These will be administered by the Speech Pathologist where appropriate.*
- An AAC assessment, conducted by a Speech Pathologist, is required for all students who are new to the school or undergoing review.
- It also requires that the AAC system be maintained. This is the responsibility of the **student's team** (i.e. student, teacher, therapists, family/carers). A student's AAC system should not be modified or changed without consultation with the student's Speech Pathologist and without reference to the student's goals.
- Communication systems will be subject to an annual audit to ensure the use, appropriateness and the importance of the AAC system is clear to all involved in the student's education and to highlight when a review is required. This will be signed off by Speech Pathologists, Classroom Teacher and Therapy Team Leader.

Implementation:

Referral and assessment

- Parents, teachers & carers wanting a review of a student's AAC system need to put a referral in with the school Speech Pathologist/s. This needs to be done formally via 'The Therapy Referral System' by the teacher, Speech Pathologist/s or other school therapist.
- A request for additional assessments to review a student's current communication system can be requested by the following people; teacher, parent/legal guardian, external therapist and case worker/manager
- Students may undergo an assessment for a communication system from the school Speech Pathologist/s who will also provide adequate training, ongoing support and review of a student's communication system.
- In the event of a parent / career seeking support from an external Speech Pathologist the decision regarding AAC systems used within school must be made in consultation with the Yarra Ranges Speech Pathologist/s and the student's team prior to implementing an AAC system with the student.

- If a system is recommended by an external Speech Pathologist, the device and symbol set need to be appropriate for the setting at Yarra Ranges SDS; this includes ensuring the symbols used are consistent with those used at Yarra Ranges SDS.

AAC Trial and Evaluation

- The school Speech Pathologist/s will be responsible for determining the length of the trial period, the device(s) trialed and the appropriateness of the system trialed.
- When trialing a new communication system, the student's team (speech pathologist, classroom teacher, parents and other therapy staff involved) will be informed about the trial. The school speech pathologist will inform the student's parents of trial, information about the systems trialed and will feedback the information regarding the outcome of the trial.
- After the trial period, the school speech pathologist will discuss and evaluate the AAC system with the parents and the student's classroom teacher. This will include the outcomes of the trial, to formally establish the AAC system (if appropriate) and the student's future communication plans.
- The school Speech Pathologist will use the trial period to trial different cell numbers, layouts, page numbers, symbol types and devices/system with the student across a range of environments and different communication partners.
- If the Speech Pathologist/s deem the AAC trial to be unsuccessful, modifications will be made and the student's goals will be reviewed to determine the next stage of an AAC trial.
- After the trial period, all AAC systems will be personalized for the student. Input for the vocabulary will be required from the student's team. This may include photographs from the family such as, activities the student enjoys and specific vocabulary used by the student/classroom/parents.
- If parents do not support the use of AAC for their child the regular trial period will go ahead. If the trial of the device is deemed successful the communication device will then be partially personalized for the student. This is to assist the student in accessing the school curriculum and the school community. The communication system will be used in the classroom as a 'teaching tool' to support the student's learning but will not go home with the student. The AAC device remains the property of the Speech Pathology Department.

Electronic Communication Systems

- In most cases a school Speech Pathologist will be able to provide assessment for an electronic communication device.
- Where appropriate, the school Speech Pathologist may refer students to ComTEC (Yooralla) for an additional assessment or support with an electronic communication device. This may occur when the school Speech Pathologist deems an electronic communication device may be appropriate for a student with more complex communication needs. The entire team at Yarra Ranges SDS should be a part of this assessment process.
- Accessing ComTEC services at Yooralla incurs a cost to the student's family.
- The school Speech Pathologist will provide necessary reports and complete application forms when involved in assessments and prescription of a device.
- Electronic devices are loaned from companies in Australia for a restricted trial period. The trial dates are subject to device availability and demand for the device through the company. Additionally, the company and Yarra Ranges SDS have their own waiting lists for the device.
- Before an electronic communication device is trialed with a student, it is a requirement that the student is proficient in the use of their non-electronic communication system (i.e. PECS, PODD).

- Proficiency will be assessed by the school Speech Pathologist/s in consultation with the classroom teacher. The PODD Evaluation Form and the PECS Long Term Progress Form will be used by the Speech Pathologist/s to evaluate the proficiency of the student with their non-electronic system.

Non-electronic communication systems

- When a non-electronic communication system (e.g. P.E.C.S, P.O.D.D or communication/chat book) is deemed appropriate by the school Speech Pathologist, an assessment needs to be administered in order to establish and evaluate the effectiveness of an AAC system.
- Initial set up costs for a non-electronic communication system will be covered by the school, if issued by a school Speech Pathologist. Classrooms/parents will incur fee if the book is lost, damaged etc.
- Costs of any additional copies requested by parents/carer (for any reason) need to be covered by the parent/carer.
- The non-electronic AAC system is the property of Yarra Ranges SDS Speech Pathology Department during the trial period. Once the system has been personalized for the student, the AAC system becomes the property of the student. The trial AAC system is to be returned to the Speech Pathology Department at the end of the trial period as discussed with the team in the initial trial information session.

Support, training and ongoing review

- The issuing Speech Pathologist is required to provide initial comprehensive support to the student's team.
- The issuing Speech Pathologist is required to provide ongoing and comprehensive support to the student's team as requested by the team through the referral system.
- The school Speech Pathologist, in collaboration and consultation with all team members, is required to take responsibility to create, order, customize, educate the student's team regarding the communication system.
- Parents and Teachers will participate in training sessions and take responsibility for ongoing training on established communication systems as offered by the school. This is not applicable if the communication system is being trialed.
- Informal training will be given to parents, teaching staff and teaching assistants during the trial period.

REVIEW CYCLE AND EVALUATION

This policy was last updated August 2018 and is scheduled for review in 2020