

Support communication

A suggestion for implementing the strategy

'Key areas of support' from the Guide: [Autism and learning](#)

Includes:

- Support understanding
- Ask ākonga what works for them
- Support expressive and oral language
- Honour student contributions
- Support AAC users
- Useful resources

Support understanding

Takiwātanga - autism can mean that ākonga find understanding other people challenging.

Understanding others

- Use fewer words
- Slow down the rate of speaking
- Give learners more time to process information
- Use clear, concise information with supporting visuals whenever possible.

Understanding abstract language such as sarcasm, metaphors, exaggeration, absolutes or humour

- Teach and support understanding of abstract concepts
- Avoid absolutes as learners may take these literally
- Use terms such as “usually” to avoid absolutes, for example, “We usually play at about 11am”.

Understanding gestures, facial expressions, or body language and applying to social situations

- Teach ākonga to recognise, interpret and respond appropriately to gestures, facial expressions, or body language.
- Teach, model and practise conversation, social and interpersonal skills such as turn taking and questioning.

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Autism and learning](#)

Strategy: [Key areas of support](#)

Suggestion: [Support communication](#)

Date

17 September 2025

Link

inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/autism-and-learning/support-communication

Ask ākonga what works for them

Ask ākonga what communication approaches they prefer.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/4yAAOI6JUsM>

No captions or transcript

Source:

[Organization for Autism Research \(US\)](#)

<http://youtu.be/4yAAOI6JUsM?t=6m15s>

Support expressive and oral language

Communication skills are a priority learning need for some autistic students.

Oral language encompasses any method of communication the child uses as a first language, for example New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems that replace or augment speech.

- Provide ample opportunities for students to make their feelings, thoughts and needs known.
- Give students a heads up, when possible, so they can prepare their response.
- Give students time to respond.
- Explicitly teach non-verbal communication strategies, such as eye contact, facial expressions and body language.
- Explicitly teach skills associated with social interactions, such as joining a group, taking part in two way conversations, and reading non-verbal cues.
- Talk directly to the student, not to their support person.

For students who use a specialised communication tool or system:

- they should always have access to it
- model communication using their tool or system.

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Honour student contributions

Listen to ākonga and honour their contributions.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/H7dca7U7GI8>

Closed Captions

Source:

[Communication First](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7dca7U7GI8>

Support AAC users

Understand and support ākonga that use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems to meet their communication needs.

Understand the role of AAC systems

- Ākonga may communicate non-verbally using an AAC system. AAC is a term to describe methods that can help people to communicate non-verbally.
- Non-verbal communication systems use a variety of techniques including sign language, gestures, visuals, written communication, or specialised communication boards and communication technologies.
- Ākonga who use specialised communication boards and technologies communicate by selecting from an increasingly complex range of communication symbols or choices.
- Some digital systems speak words aloud for the ākonga.

Support AAC users under the guidance of the learner's Speech and Language Therapist.

- Make sure that the AAC device is consistently available, within and across settings.
- Model communication using their tool or system.
- Respond to AAC communication promptly, appropriately, and consistently.
- Prompt ākonga to use their AAC system when making requests and expressing themselves.
- Help them to give language to what they are feeling, especially after experiencing challenges.
- Set up opportunities to teach use of the AAC device by scheduling daily practice sessions and embedding opportunities throughout the day.
- Teach peers how to use the AAC device. If possible, give peers their own AAC devices.

See the [Speech, language and communication needs](#) Inclusive Education Guide for more information.

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Useful resources



Speech, language and communication support

Speech-language therapists who support children with speech, language and communication needs at school.

Publisher: Ministry of Education NZ

[Visit website](#)



What are AAC devices and how can they help my child?

Describes key communication device types.

Publisher: Westside Children's Therapy

[Visit website](#)



How students with limited verbal capabilities can thrive in inclusive classrooms

Summary of key ideas and links to video examples.

[Visit website](#)



Aided language stimulation explained

Video showing the importance of modelling language using modes the student uses.

Publisher: Loudon County Public Schools Assistive Technology

[Visit website](#)

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