A basic introduction to AAC

The following is an extract from a Scope Cap Team Day (8/5/03):

GETTING GOING WITH AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC)
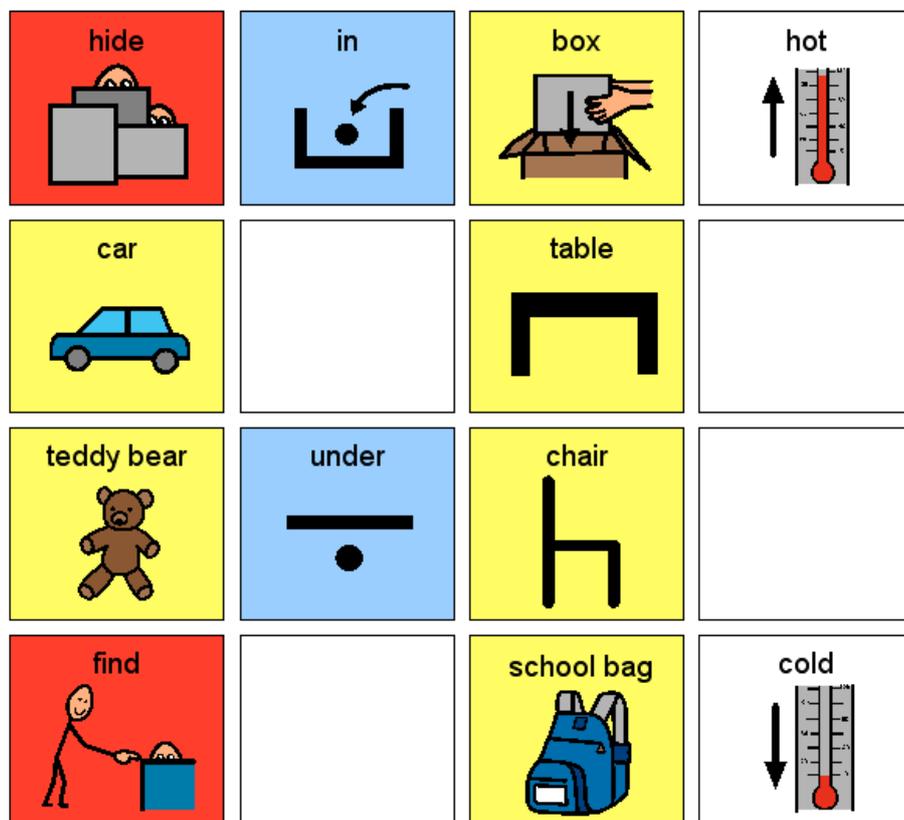
"ALL BEHAVIOUR COMMUNICATES"
McDonald 1985 'AAC for Persons with Moderate and Severe Disabilities'

What is AAC?
- "a means by which an individual can <u>supplement</u> or <u>replace</u> spoken communication. Communication may range from any movement or behaviour which is observed and interpreted by another person as meaningful, to the use of a code agreed upon between people where items have specific meanings i.e. a language."

- "aided or unaided communication modes used as a supplement to or as an alternative to oral language, including gestures, sign language, picture symbols, the alphabet, and computers with synthetic speech."

- **Unaided Communication:** "include techniques that do not require the use of an external object".

- **Aided Communication:** "involve the use of physical objects, typically referred to as aids or devices which are used to communicate messages".

(Glennan and de Coste 1997 Handbook of Augmentative and Alternative Communication)

"Communication may range from any movement or behaviour, which is observed and interpreted by another person as meaningful, to the use of a code agreed upon between people where items have specific meanings i.e. a language. For example, we all use gesture (e.g. waving goodbye) and graphic symbols (e.g. washing label symbols) in our daily life.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication is both a means of accessing an educational curriculum and language in its own right. It is appropriate for individuals who have difficulty with receptive and expressive language due to physical, sensory or learning disability. It provides an opportunity to attain emotional, social, educational and vocational goals."
Editors: Chinner S., Nelms G., Skinner P., Thomas P., Williams G. AAC Policy Document (2000) www.ace-centre.org.uk

What communication system should the child use?

The choice of a communication system is a difficult one. Systems and devices are often divided into categories:

- **Signing** – such as British Sign Language, Signed English, sign vocabularies such as the Makaton Vocabulary or Signalong

- **Graphic symbols –** Picture Communication Symbols, Rebus, Blissymbols

- **Simple digitised Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs)** – such as single message devices (BigMack, Talking Buddy or Chipper) or sequenced single messages (Step by Step, Sequencer)

- **Digitised voice output devices** - such as AlphaTalker, DecAid, Macaw, Message Mates, Portacom, etc. (some are basic; others are more complex with 'themes', topic or 'levels' facilities)

- **Computer-based communication applications** - such as EZ Keys, or CallTalk, Chailey Communication System or Ingfield Dynamic Vocabularies, with programs such as Clicker, Speaking Dynamically Pro, Talking Screen or Winspeak.

- **Synthesised VOCAs -** such as Cameleon, Tellus, Pathfinder, DynaVox/DynaMyte, or Lightwriter.

Children will commonly use communication charts and books as well as VOCAs and computers. Communication aids go with children *all the time*, enabling them to participate and interact, ask and answer questions, comment, direct, explain and report, and practise their use of language in a natural and immediate way.