



## PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #57



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### Speech Generating Devices

Use of Speech Generating Devices is an evidence-based practice applicable to learners from preschool through high school. These devices fall under the broader umbrella of Augmentative and Alternative Communication or AAC.

The Missouri Autism Guidelines Initiative (MAGI) manual on Autism Spectrum Disorders: Guide to Evidence-based Interventions describes Speech Generating Devices as follows: electronic, portable devices used to teach learners communicative skills and provide a means of communication.

Seems easy enough...buy a device, program it, and give it to the learner. Well, there is more to it than that, and Project ACCESS staff has some suggestions for optimal use of speech generating devices.

#### Dedicated Device

We have found that a multi-use device such as an iPad or tablet really needs to be dedicated to communication. That limits the use of the device for other applications, but a learner's 'voice' needs to be available at all times—just like a human voice. When learners are switching back forth between the communication app and other apps, this limits their communicative opportunities! Some of our learners have two devices: one for communication and one for other applications.

#### Level of Difficulty

We recommend not purchasing the most expensive and complicated application or device on the market, at least initially. We have two reasons for this suggestion. First, if you get something too complicated and time consuming for you and the learner, you won't use it. We have seen far too many devices on shelves not being used for their intended purpose. Secondly, try some cheaper or free applications. This will help determine the features that work for an individual learner. If a device, rather than a tablet, is the target, borrow first! This will save lots of time, money and frustration.

#### Motivation

Using a tablet or a device can be a challenge. Consider motivation when planning vocabulary. Which phrase is more motivating to an early elementary learner? *I need to go to the bathroom?* or *Hey, come and play Legos with me.* Think about what motivates your individual learner. Provide play vocabulary. We know one speech pathologist who noticed the little girls at her school were playing cheerleader. She programmed some cheers into the device, so her

learner could play, too! This little girl was very motivated to use her device! Be a student of what the others in the environment are doing.

### **Communication Partners**

Train communication partners to use the device, also. If mom accesses the vocabulary, she is providing a model as well as using the same language modality as the child.

### **Accept all Communication**

Learners do not have to be limited to their devices or tablets. If they have a few words, great. If they sign a little, accept that too. If they're pointing to something, that's also communication. Communication involves a system, not just an electronic tool.

You can download the MAGI guidelines from this link: [www.autismguidelines.dmh.mo.gov](http://www.autismguidelines.dmh.mo.gov)

You can check into borrowing devices; visit the following link to find out about device loans: <http://at.mo.gov/>.

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