

Communicating in Times of Stress

“In moments of intense stress—when speaking up and being heard may be more important than ever—some people lose the ability to communicate in the ways they usually do.”



How can I help a person who is having trouble communicating?

Focus on accommodating their disability, making communication possible, and helping them through the stressor; avoid prioritizing or pathologizing the speech/language loss itself. Helping them to regain their usual communication should not be the only goal of your interaction.

Offer unconditional support

Patience, peace, and quiet

Get creative to find a way to communicate

Never move on until you understand

Help them use their coping skills

Treat them with respect



What is AAC and how can it help?

AAC stands for augmentative and alternative communication. Everyone communicates without speech sometimes. Pointing and gesturing is AAC. Making facial expressions is AAC. Typing on a keyboard or a phone is AAC. Using emojis is AAC.

Words we use matter

Speech & language loss is not anyone's fault

Using AAC is not shameful, annoying, or childish

Chronic stress is stress too

Know that some people never have access to speech as a reliable form of communication.

More Effective Communication Strategies:

- Patient Provider Communication
- Low Tech AAC
- Aphasia Strategies



Ask: Do you have a crisis plan?

If not, you can use THIS TEMPLATE to help you better understand how to support this person.