



Red Hill Special School

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Policy


Communication is the process of connecting with others to exchange views, feelings, information, knowledge and experiences. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) recognises that communication is a basic need and an individual right of all humans.

Red Hill Special School is committed to ensuring all students with complex communication needs (CCN) will have and use an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system that meets their varied and individualised communication needs and enables their right to communicate in all environments.


Introduction

Red Hill Special School caters for students with an intellectual disability Prep to Year 12. Red Hill Special School's AAC policy has been developed in accordance with the guidelines of the Communication Bill of Rights.


Communication Bill of Rights



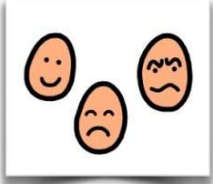
I have the right to my own friends and social life.



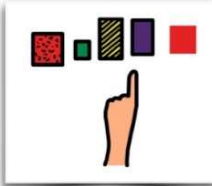
I have the right to ask for what and who I want and where to go.




I ALWAYS have the right to say, "no!"



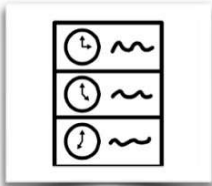
I have the right to say what I feel.



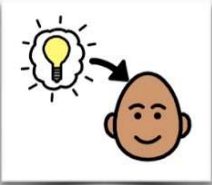
I have the right to make my own, real, choices.




I have the right to say what think.



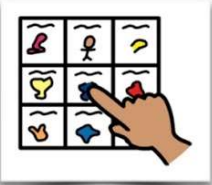
I have the right to ask for, get and give information.




I have the right to know about the people in my life and everything happening to me.



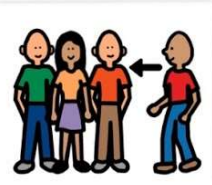
I have the right to be taught to communicate and have what I need.




I have the right to have my communication system (and other tools), to have them working and to be with people who know how to set up, use and fix my communication system.




I have the right to be heard and answered, even if I can't have what I want.




I have the right to be part of my community



I have the right to be treated with respect.



I have the right to be talked to and not about.



I have the right to be talked with in a way I understand.

Adapted from the NJC Communication Bill of Rights 2016, ASHA by Kate Ahern, M.S.Ed Mayer-Johnson Communication Symbols Used with Permission

Communication is the foundation of all learning and we are committed to providing communication opportunities and supports for students to experience success. This policy outlines the aims, AAC procedures and expectations for communication at Red Hill Special School.

Background

The communication data collected at Red Hill Special School demonstrates that we have students communicating at a range of different levels. Our aim is for all students to become autonomous communicators. This means that they can communicate whatever they want to say, to whoever they want to say it to, wherever they want to say it, and however they want to say it. (Porter & Cafiero, 2009).

Data about student communication is collected using the ROCC (Roadmap of Communicative Competence) developed by Janelle Sampson in 2019. As defined in the ROCC, students within the school may be:

Emergent Communicators

These are students who are typically using behaviours, facial expression or body language to interact with others to have their needs met and require a familiar partner to interpret their behaviours. They may have awareness of symbols but have not yet made connection to symbols convey consistent meaning.

Transitional Communicators

These are students who are beginning to take ownership of their message and are using symbols to represent their message. They may still use body language, facial expression and behaviours if most efficient but are learning that symbolic communication is needed to be autonomous. These students have their own AAC system and may range from using single words to phrases and sentences and may appear to have varying competencies in different environments.

Independent Communicators

These are students who are able to autonomously communicate within their home and community. They can be understood clearly by their communication partner (familiar or unfamiliar) and they are able to clarify their message if misunderstood. Students at this level are able to spell (or use other strategies) to access words that are not in their system and can say "whatever they want to say, whenever they want to say it and however they want to say it."

Aims

Red Hill Special School aims to:

1. Adopt a multi-modal communication approach throughout the school where students have access to individual communication systems throughout the day and all communication modes are acknowledged, used and valued.
2. Create and provide opportunities for real life communication that is embedded in the curriculum and across school environments, enabling students to practice and use their communication to the best of their ability.
3. Support staff, parents and caregivers to work together to provide productive learning communities, which support the communication rights and individual needs of all students.
4. Use a team-based approach to supporting our students' communication through the belief that communication occurs all day, every day and we are all responsible for making sure this happens for everyone.



Comprehensive Communication at Red Hill Special School

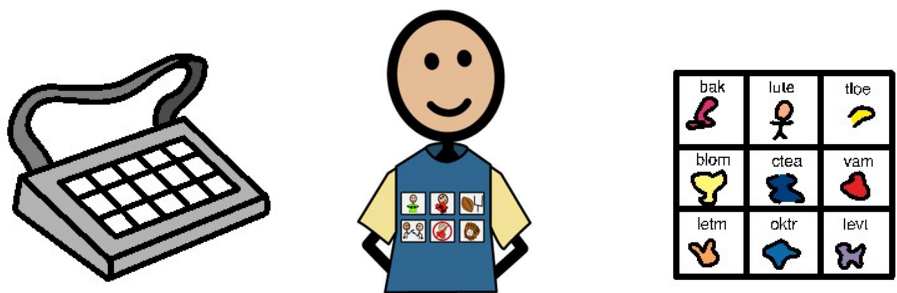
Red Hill Special School recognises that every individual has the right to communicate. All staff at Red Hill Special School receive extensive training in best practice in AAC and in being good communication partners, and an understanding that a comprehensive AAC system (e.g. Proloquo2Go, PODD, LAMP, Auslan and Key Word Sign, etc) supports an individual to develop in the four areas of communicative competence.

The Participation Model (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013) is the current model of best practice in AAC. This provides an overall framework of considerations associated with enabling people with complex communication needs to communicate as their peers do. Working within the parameters of the Participation Model, we aim to support each individual to be the best communicator that they can with their current communication system. We also provide support for them to reach a higher level of communicative competence, including supporting a system that students will use in the future.

We believe in students' ability to communicate and use language and aim to give them a system that enables them to develop and use language. We recognise that there are many strategies good communication partners use including presuming competence and attributing meaning when interacting with emergent communicators. We also recognise that aided language stimulation including modelling throughout the day is an important technique and that a comprehensive AAC system is required for us to be able to do this throughout the school day.

Staff at Red Hill Special School wear Aided Language Displays (ALD's) with quick chat vocabulary to support students in a range of environments, activities and for varying levels of communicative function. Staff also carry and use comprehensive AAC systems (high tech, low tech, signing, speech) that are appropriate for the class they are in, and model for a range of purposes across the school day.

Finally, we understand that all communication is multimodal and that all forms of communication are as valid as each other – this includes facial expression, natural gesture, vocalisations, verbalisations, signing, high and low tech aided AAC.



High Tech and Low Tech AAC at Red Hill Special School

Red Hill Special School uses aided language input and output in all classrooms as well as speech and signing. We believe that every individual with complex communication needs is entitled to both low and high tech AAC to give them a voice in all environments. Many classrooms at Red Hill Special School use a range of high and low-tech AAC systems. These include (but are not limited to) a variety of iPad apps, speech generating devices, aided language displays, core word boards and a variety of PODD Books.

At Red Hill Special School, we also recognise that students access AAC in a variety of ways, and that symbol sets require individual considerations. Students have access to High Contrast materials for individuals with a Vision Impairment or who have difficulty with complex visual arrays. There are also Alternative Access methods such as Eye Gaze devices (eye pointing), Partner Assisted Scanning, switch access and more, for students who have physical impairments that impact their ability to point with direct access (or touch).

It is important that each student (and staff member) has access to both low and high tech AAC for a range of reasons. For example, there are times in every day where a high-tech system may not be available or appropriate for modelling. This could be due to lack of battery, the environment e.g. during a water play activity, or just because it is out of reach. The low-tech systems and boards ensure we still have AAC available at all times without having to worry about these factors. They also have the advantage of being wearable so they are with us at all times, ensuring communication access for students in all school environments.

We also understand the importance of high tech as it produces voice output, enables access to features such as text-to-speech and offers more just-in-time AAC features that let us add vocabulary on the go.

Please note: Red Hill Special School recognises that there are a range of AAC options and that different individuals may require different options. We are happy to support any comprehensive AAC system recommended by a speech pathologist for an individual student.

References

Beukelman, D., & Mirenda, P. (2013). *Augmentative and alternative communication: Supporting children and adults with complex communication needs* (4th ed.) Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

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