

Getting Started with Core Words

We need to think carefully about the words we give people who use symbol-based AAC. Often the focus is on making choices, but communication involves so much more than just choosing or asking for things! Giving core words enables language to be used for a much wider range of communication purposes. Giving core words also enables symbols to be used in all contexts and settings.

What are core words?

Core words are highly useful words that communicate a range of ideas across any setting to anyone.

Research shows that up to 80% of the words we say are core words.

If we include core words on someone's AAC system we are giving them the tools to communicate across a wide range of purposes and situations.

Core words include:

- **verbs** e.g. go, like, stop
- **adjectives** e.g. different, big
- **pronouns** e.g. I, you, it
- **questions** e.g. who, what, where
- **useful concepts** e.g. more, not

Why start with core words?

Core words are used frequently by speaking children from the early stages of communication; "**Go! Want! More!**" They are powerful and can be used across settings to communicate a wide range of messages:

- **asking questions** "you want?"
- **giving instructions** "stop that!"
- **describing words or objects** "it big".

Verbal language, signs, gestures, or real objects can be used alongside core words to expand or clarify a message. For example, a child pushes away a book and points to 'different' to communicate that they want to read something else.

How do we teach core words?

Core words can be difficult to represent with a symbol – it is much easier to identify the symbol for nouns like **pig**, **apple** or **shoe** than **it**, **have** or **more!**

This means it is important to model core words by showing someone the symbol every time you say it yourself. You can point to the **help** symbol and say "let me help you" when opening a drink, tying a shoe, or getting a book ... the opportunities are endless!

With lots of repetition and exposure, anyone can learn to use core words!

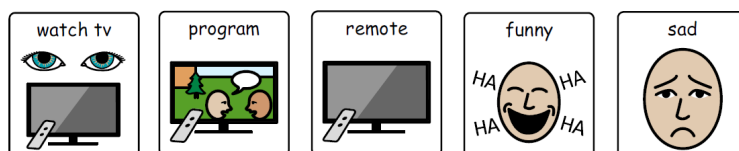


What are fringe words?

Fringe words are relevant to a specific topic or situation and tend to include a lot of nouns. They are meaningful words but are used in limited contexts. Fringe words are useful to include in someone's AAC system but should always be in addition to core words.

Core words in context

Let's look at an example of core and fringe words in context. Here is a chart containing only fringe words around the topic of watching television:

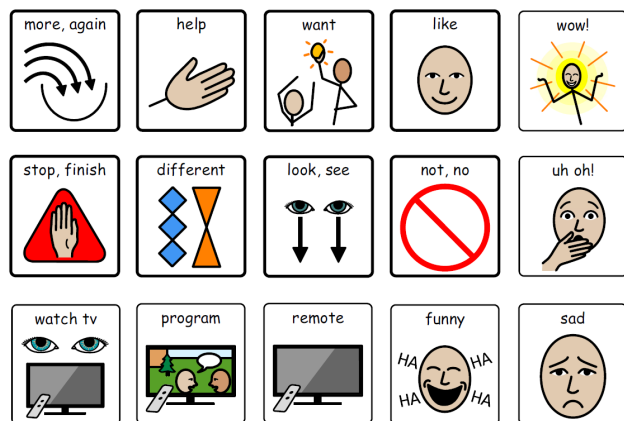


These symbols provide a limited amount to say.

“watch TV” “funny program” “remote”

You can label and request items or make simple comments but you would struggle to communicate much more than that!

Here we have added some core words allowing you to say much more by combining them with the fringe words.



Request: watch tv more, want remote, help

Reject: not watch tv

Describe: program sad

Give an opinion: like program, not funny

Give information: program finish

Ask a question: want different program?
see remote?

Get attention: wow look!

We can continue to use the core words in infinite situations and change the fringe to meet the needs of the specific contexts. The repeated use of core words across settings, situations and audiences provides endless learning and communication opportunities!



For more information on using core words or to find free charts featuring core words please follow the QR code or go acecentre.org.uk/ebooks-symbols