

LEARNING TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY – How can technology help?

Most of us communicate with others, express our opinions and do everyday tasks without even thinking about it. Not everyone is so able. The aim of an aid is to use the less able person's abilities, whatever they are, to compensate for difficulties and reduce reliance on others. Love or hate mobile phones the science that developed them has been used to great advantage in developing aids that are more easily accessible to the severely disabled.

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC)

AACs are systems that replace speech, they can be unaided e.g. pointing or gestures or aided when additional equipment is used. Aided AAC may be low tech e.g. communication books, alphabet or picture charts and E-Tran eye transfer frames or high tech, people very often use both. High tech does not mean a superior system.



A large range of high tech systems is now available which vary in complexity and sophistication. Symbols are sometimes used to help people who have difficulty reading.



Environmental Control Systems (ECS)

ECSs enable less able people to operate domestic appliances and other functions by remote control. For example:

Telephone	Lights	Curtains/blinds	Doors and windows
Television and DVD	Radio and CD	Power sockets	Computers
Page turners	Nurse call	Security alarms	Intercoms

Using an aid

The first step is to establish how well the person understands speech or written information. The next major task is to decide on the most suitable type of aid and find a way for them to operate it. All that is needed is at least one controlled, consistent movement. Various aids and operating switches are tried before deciding on the right one. One size most definitely doesn't fit all. It can take weeks or even months to train the aid user to operate a switch through movements of an eye, toe, or by a suck and blow technique.



Variety of switches



We already have a variety of switches in stock but rely on suppliers to loan equipment for assessment purposes. This can increase the time it takes before a patient has access to a system with the potential to make him/her more independent.

With the development of an ECS/ACC assessment service patients could have immediate access and the work of identifying the right system could begin without delay. Once the best system for the individual patient has been identified we can demonstrate it is not only effective but he/she is able and happy to use it.
