

Aided Language Stimulation (ALS) Mats

Aided Language Stimulation (ALS) is a communication strategy, where the adult teaches symbol meaning and models language in everyday settings.

ALS mats are activity-specific communication boards. The child is supported to use the symbols to communicate within the context of motivating activities and naturally occurring routines. They are also used to facilitate a child's comprehension of spoken language. The vocabulary on the ALS mats can be individualised to suit the needs of the child.



STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- **Positioning:** Position the ALS mat directly in front of the child. Ensure the ALS mat is visible to both you and the child.
- **Modelling:** Point to key symbols whilst you verbalise a word, phrase or sentence. The child requires frequent models of other people using ALS mats. Model a range of communicative functions including requesting (“want,” “more”), protesting (“stop it!”), commenting (“good,” “oh no!”), describing (“big bubble,” “pink pencil”), and asking/answering questions.
- **Self-Talk:** Talk about what you are doing in the moment by pointing to the corresponding picture symbols (e.g., “rolling play dough”). Model language without expectation for the child to always imitate or respond.
- **Wait:** Pause to create opportunities for the child to communicate or to take their turn in an interaction.
- **Expansion:** Assess the child's current expressive language skills by counting the number of words they are using to communicate. Model 1-2 words beyond this level. Continue to extend the child's utterances as their language skills grow e.g., “more” → “want more” → “I want more” → “I want more bubbles”
- **Responding:** If the child points to the icons without verbalising, verbalise it on their behalf and carry out the request/action. Respond to ALL communication attempts. Interpret the child's facial expressions, vocalisations and body language. Treat these as intentional forms of communication. For example, if the child looks towards you or reaches for a toy, they may be requesting “more”. Say “more” and point to the corresponding picture symbol.