

Augmentative Communication Services

Referrals for a Written Communication Assessment

Guidelines for the Referring Occupational Therapist

Role and Responsibility of the Referring Occupational Therapist:

1. You are referring a client to Augmentative Communication Services (ACS) for a written communication assessment because the client's current writing methods are not meeting his/her daily needs. We need to know what writing activities need to be completed at home, how often these activities are carried out, how the client currently produces written work, the quality of the written work, and why the client's current method is not meeting his/her needs?
2. As the referring occupational therapist, you are expected to provide baseline information regarding a client's writing, keyboarding, and literacy skills before making a referral. It is only after your assessment and exploration of basic strategies e.g. built-in accessibility features in the computer, that a referral to ACS should be made to provide further assessment, equipment trials, and support for you and the client in addressing his/her written communication needs.

Tips for the Referring Occupational Therapist:

The following tips are intended to help you in your assessment process, to determine if you should refer the client to ACS, and to provide the information required for completion of the application form

Written Communication Skills and Accommodations:

- Writing expectations for the client at home: homework (amount and frequency during the week), writing letters, emails, social networking, etc.
- What accommodations for writing are currently being made at home and/or school: reduced quantity, oral presentation, scribing, use of a computer, etc?
- Why are the client's current writing methods **not** meeting his/her needs?
- Assess writing skills, including legibility and speed, and attach a sample if possible. Is the client's legibility and speed within expected age norms? If yes, what is the reason for the referral (e.g. pain, endurance, fatigue)?
- Does the client use a computer at home? Assess keyboarding skills: can he/she access a standard keyboard and mouse; does he/she demonstrate keyboard familiarity; can the client self-generate novel

text independently; if the client can access the keyboard, is the client's typing speed equivalent to, or faster than writing speed?

- If the client currently accesses or tries to access a computer, what are the physical limitations and/or difficulties? e.g., Does the client have difficulty targeting keys due to ataxia? Are there issues such as pain, fatigue, vision, etc. that have an impact on successful computer access?
- Do you think the client may need alternative strategies such as one-handed typing, word prediction, or voice recognition? Is the client limited by fine motor deficits or muscle tone that only allows access to the keyboard with a few fingers?

Literacy Skills

To be eligible for a written communication assessment:

- The client must demonstrate the ability to independently self-generate novel text (not perfect spelling), or must demonstrate the need and the potential to transfer ideas to written form, given appropriate technology supports.

Or

- The client presents with such extensive physical limitations, that they are unable to acquire or demonstrate the ability to self-generate novel text without the provision of adaptive equipment and/or software. (You should have a very strong clinical impression that this client would have the potential to develop literacy if there were accommodations for those physical limitations). Do consider referring these clients at a young age if you feel they would benefit from specialized equipment to develop the pre-requisite literacy skills.

As an occupational therapist, it is often difficult to reliably assess the client's literacy skills. Use your best judgment and err on the side of the client; the team's special education liaison teacher, as part of the writing aids assessment process, may complete further assessment as indicated.

Possible indicators of emergent literacy skills in pre-school clients:

- Recognizes if a book is upside down.
- Recognizes front and back of book
- Knows where to begin reading
- Is developing directionality
- Indicates the difference between words and pictures
- Knows that the print not the picture is the part to be read (i.e. the print contains the message)
- Understands the concept of first and last
- Knows what a letter is and can identify it.
- Recognizes environmental print in context e.g. STOP signs
- Recognizes letters in his/her own name.

Before you refer a school-aged client to ACS, ask the client to:

- Recite the alphabet **or**, if able, print or type it. Note if the client requires regular verbal cues to guide him/her to the next letter **or** if he/she requires coaching to sing through the alphabet song.
- Identify letters out of sequence, and/or the letters of his/her name.
- Give the sound each letter of the alphabet makes.
- Independently spell his/her name? Does the client need phonetic cues, e.g. say the sound for “s” to help them to identify the letter.
- Spell simple words such as “Mom”, “Dad”, “cat”... (Phonetic spelling of a word is adequate.)
- Read his/her own name, simple words, etc.
- Write and read a simple sentence independently. (e.g. I love Mom. or My dog is fat.)
- Compose a sentence independently (Does the client need coaching to come up with something to write? Does the client need coaching to guide him/her to the next word in the sentence?)

*If the client needs regular, consistent coaching regarding any of these issues, he/she is **not** independently generating text.*

The Bottom Line:

If there are no physical limitations that affect the client’s skills, **and** the client cannot independently generate text, **and** the client does not have regular home writing needs, the client is not eligible for ACS services.

If you have a client who is currently not eligible for ACS services, but you would like some advice, ideas, tips, strategies and/or resource information regarding how to promote written communication and computer access, please consider seeking consultation services through “ACS Office Hours”.

How do Office Hours work?

- If you wish to discuss the referral with an ACS-SLP or ACS-OT, please connect with our Client Services Assistant at 519- 886-8886 or 1-888-372-2259 ext. 2222, or email at csa-acs@kidsability.ca
- Discussions can be in person at the Waterloo site, on the phone or virtualye.