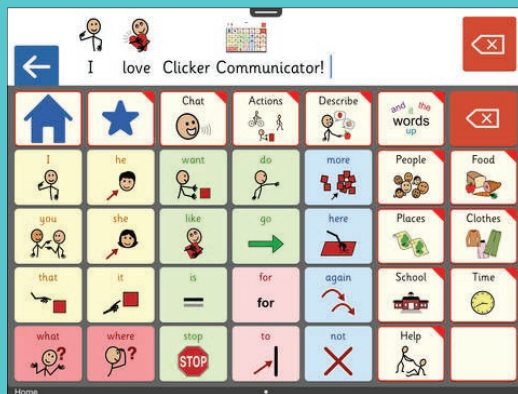




Clicker Communicator: AAC For Children & Young People – App Review



On the last day of school I yelled upstairs to my 13 year old boys asking what they wanted for breakfast. The responses were “eggs” and “c-wool.” C-wool is the approximation for cereal used by my apraxic, autistic AAC user and in keeping with his limited expressive language. Mr. Eggs is a TIPS kid who took the SAT this spring so he presumably can speak in complete sentences but like most teens he speaks in tweet sized bursts unless complaining or making excuses.

What’s this story have to do with an app review? It puts in context how we communicate. I initially ran through Clicker Communicator, the new AAC app from Crick Software and thought where’s the period, no grammar engine and this doesn’t do everything some of my other AAC apps do. Upon reflection, however, I decided that’s ok. Verbal exchanges are not run through Grammarly before being uttered and as my own kids made clear, most sound like texts or tweets anyway. For children, especially language impaired ones, the focus should be on what they say rather than how they say it.

Clicker Communicator works for several reasons. Those new to AAC technology can get started out of the box as it comes with three pre-made vocabulary sets of core words. These range from emergent with just a few pages to reasonably competent and include basics like food, activities and people along with connectors and Dolch words. Everything is color coded by part of speech and Symbolstix icons are used. If other users prefer or are already familiar with other symbol sets, Widgit and PCS sets are available as in-app downloads.

The core page sets can be supplemented with free downloads from Crick’s learning grids. These are created with specific school and social activities in mind. Words are grouped around a theme like you’d find in a visual scene display AAC setup. Available pages right now include My Pet, Jack and the Beanstalk retell and several on elementary science topics. Many work well with perennial IEP goals like retelling stories, sequencing events and making predictions. They make it possible for a language impaired child to participate in circle time or class discussions.

Adding vocabulary and new page sets is where Clicker Communicator really shines. The existing learning grids serve as templates for parents and teachers to create their own content. Virtually everything is customizable from number of rows and columns to background color. The to die for feature is the ability to add multiple items simply by separating them with a comma. If you can type 75 words a minute then you can create pages of animals in literally a minute. Pictures automatically populate too. ONE MINUTE. Reordering is as easy as dragging cells around the page and core words you don't want to shift can be pinned in place.

The speaking function is fully customizable too. There are multiple kids' voices with British, Australian and American accents. In settings, which are hidden in a disappearing bar, parents can specify if words will be spoken when selected or only when the message is complete. The app will store recent phrases and popular ones can be favorited for easy access.

Another notable feature is the accessibility added by SuperKeys, Crick's keyboard extension. SuperKeys breaks the grid down into sections. Users tap an area, it then expands and they are able to select an individual square within it. Many AAC users have difficulty isolating a small square from a field of 24, 48 or 96. Laser cut key guards are one option, but they limit use of the iPad for other functions, and don't work with many cases. SuperKeys is simple and is not an added expense. With it a full screen of vocabulary is still available, but tapping one word is possible when it's blown up.

When it comes to helping special needs kids, everybody seems to have an opinion. ABA is either the only scientifically research based intervention known to work or it's child abuse. AAC has some of the same absolutes. The LAMP crowd is rather militant about the need for motor planning in AAC. Proloquo fans many of whom don't even use AAC support it because it's the bestselling AAC app. Caught in the middle are a bunch of parents wondering how to get their child to communicate effectively. Clicker Communicator is a great choice for them. The basics can be learned by teachers and family members within a few minutes. There's no stress over whether a word should be on one screen or another. Words don't have to be turned on or off. Page sets can be shared between home and school devices using Airdrop or DropBox. It allows kids to communicate in structured settings which is often easier than general social exchanges. It may not be the last AAC app you buy but it could be the first to allow your child a chance to actively communicate beyond yes, no and more.

