



Complex Child E-Magazine

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The New Era of Communication: Part 2: iPad Apps by Allison Swets

One of the nice things about iPad communication apps is that you have a lot of choices to pick from. As of this writing I was able to find 22 communications applications in the app store (<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>) using the search criteria “communication autism.” That is not to say you must have autism to use these apps. I find that these search criteria yielded the most relevant choices. For a complete list of communication apps, see <http://www.spectronicsinoz.com/article/iphoneipad-apps-for-aac>.

The apps vary in price range, focus or scope and usability. Which ones you choose will depend greatly on the user and your budget. Thankfully, the choices are many and growing all the time. And if you are so inclined you could create your own app! Parents just like us who have a child with communication difficulties create many of these apps.

The price for apps ranges from free for certain demos like iComm by Bappz, to \$189 for Proloquo2Go by AssitiveWare. Many apps are in the middle of that range as well. Demos are a perfect way to try out an app before committing to it. If you are inclined to buy it there is a button in the demo that allows for a seamless upgrade. For example, upgrade for iComm is \$7.99.

The apps also differ in focus. Some are created to communicate only the most basic things, such as Yes/No in apps like Answers:Yes/No by SimplifiedTouch (\$0.99) and Yes/No Bilingual by Smarty Ears (\$1.99). This may be a place to start with someone just learning what a communication device is all about.

Answers:Yes/No

I downloaded Answers:Yes/No by SimplifiedTouch for my son, who has cerebral palsy and limited dexterity. It was easy to figure out. When you open the software there are two square screen buttons, a green YES and a red NO. When either is touched, you hear a voice saying yes or no. You can change the voice to be a child's or an adult's, male or female. In addition, you can customize the two buttons to either record and/or read any other two things, such as more/done or whatever you'd like. It even changes the button colors to yellow and blue.

I think this a perfect beginning software. For \$0.99 you can truly get a feel for whether a child has a good grasp of basic communication skills. The only thing I would do differently is try to fashion an overlay out of craft foam or cardboard because both yes and no can be depressed and therefore spoken simultaneously. This may also be something the designer can alter.



Last night I let my son have a crack at it and asked him questions like, "Do you want to go to sleep?" and, "Do you want to play more iPhone?" and he was able to figure out the software in one minute even with his limited dexterity. When motivation is behind the communicating, our kids can go very far!

Tap to Talk

Other apps can support more user-initiated conversation, such as Tap to Talk by Assistyx. This app is free to download but requires a \$99 per year subscription at taptotalk.com to create more albums for topics. You can use the basic starter album at no cost and there are more free albums on their website.

Tap to Talk comes with a starter album that includes six basic topics, including Go, Play, Hungry, Drink, Emotion, and Bathroom. This may be enough for the advanced beginner in alternative communication. Each topic is accompanied by a brightly drawn and cheery appropriate but proprietary symbol, such as a happy face for emotion or a hungry looking face with utensils in hand for the Hungry topic. I applaud their attention to detail with these drawings. With your yearly subscription you can customize the software with your own pics and recordings, including pics you can find in other symbol sets created for communication.

I tried to investigate whether you can change the number of topics on the screen so a child can just start with one or two. From what I read, you can with the subscription. My

educated guess is that you can create a customized album with only the buttons you want. It takes a little time and cash but you get exactly what you want.



As I reviewed Tap to Talk's website, I realized that one of the strengths of this software is that once you subscribe, you can publish customized albums to many devices like a Nintendo (I didn't know you could use a Nintendo as a speech device!), an iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch or Android device. This is a great system for a school. The software transcends the platform and focuses on customization. A speech therapist could make one album for Roger's iPod and another for Alyssa's Nintendo.

What I don't like about this software is, of course, the price for subscription. But if I were to buy a subscription I gather I wouldn't have to buy one every year.

If you are in the market for communication software for your child, check out some of the offerings mentioned. There is likely an app that will fit your needs and budget.

Allison is a stay-at-home mom who homeschools two of her three children. When not tending to her kiddos, husband or three insolent dogs, she is studying to be a nurse and loves blogging and crafting. You can find her at www.candogoods.wordpress.com

Screenshots from iTunes.