Improving Communication Skills in Non-Verbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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What we sometimes see as a failure to **BEHAVE** properly, is actually a failure to **COMMUNICATE** properly.

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Agenda

- A few thoughts on Communication
- What is Apraxia?
- How can Functional Communication Training help children with ASD?
- How can Augmentative and Alternative Communication help children with ASD?
- Tips to improve communication skills at home
- Videos
A few thoughts on communication…

- Communication involves behavior directed to another person who in turn provides tangible or social rewards.
- Communication does not always involve speaking.
- Communication is our primary goal: Augmentative and alternative communication systems will not inhibit speech development.
“Each person with Autism Spectrum Disorder has different communication skills. Some people can speak well. Others can’t speak at all or only very little. About 40% of children with an ASD do not talk at all. About 25%–30% of children with ASD have some words at 12 to 18 months of age and then lose them. Others might speak, but not until later in childhood.”
Will my child talk?
Childhood Apraxia of Speech

- "Childhood apraxia of speech (CAS) is a neurological childhood speech sound disorder in which the precision and consistency of movements underlying speech are impaired in the absence of neuromuscular deficits (e.g. abnormal reflexes, abnormal tone).

- CAS may occur as a result of known neurological impairment, in association with complex neurobehavioral disorders of known and unknown origin, or as an idiopathic neurogenic speech sound disorder. The core impairment in planning and/or programming spatiotemporal parameters of movement sequences results in errors in speech sound production and prosody" asha.org
What does this mean?

- It’s hard for the child’s brain to plan and coordinate movements of oral motor muscles
- The child struggles at planning the movements needed to make speech sounds
Functional Communication Training

Functional communication training (FCT) is a procedure in which an individual is taught an alternative response that results in the same class of reinforcement identified as maintaining problem behavior.
**What does this mean?**

- FCT is a procedure where an individual is taught a different way to communicate something that will produce the same result that was obtained through problem behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem behavior</th>
<th>Parent's reaction</th>
<th>Outcome for the child</th>
<th>What can we teach the child that will replace the challenging behavior?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John wants popcorn. He starts whining when he sees the popcorn.</td>
<td>Caregivers give John the popcorn.</td>
<td>John got his popcorn!</td>
<td>To use a talker to ask for popcorn appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah does not want to do the work and starts tantruming</td>
<td>Caregivers move away and tell her she can be all done</td>
<td>Sarah did not have to do the her work.</td>
<td>Teach her to ask for help (if task is too difficult), teach her to ask for a break or teach her to ask to be all done.</td>
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</table>
JUST BECAUSE I DON'T TALK...

Doesn’t mean I have nothing to say.

Just because I don't answer...

Doesn’t mean that I don’t understand

Give me access to AAC...

And

And hear my voice!

#ISpeakAAC

Kathryn Helland
What is Augmentative and Alternative Communication?

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) includes all forms of communication (other than oral speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas. We all use AAC when we make facial expressions or gestures, use symbols or pictures, or write.

asha.org
A few thoughts on AAC….

- ACC may help increase social interactions, school performance and feelings of self-worth

- AAC users should not stop using speech if they are able to do so

- Types of AAC systems:
  - **Unaided communication systems** - Rely on the user's body to convey messages. Examples include gestures, body language, and/or sign language.
  - **Aided communication systems** - require the use of tools or equipment in addition to the user's body.
Types of AAC
How do we teach our patients to use AAC?

- Identify preferred foods or toys
- Teach them Phase 1 to phase 4 of Picture Exchange Communication System approach
- Transition to a Speech Generating Device
- Create lots of opportunities to communicate throughout their day
- Continue working on their speech
Tips for improving your child’s communication skills at home, in school and in the community

- Don’t give away freebies! Make them ask for everything
- Have the talker available to them at all times
- Use talker for **communication only**. No fun games or apps should compete with communication attempts
- Create opportunities for communication with other family members other than Mom and Dad
- Take it into the community: Restaurants, the grocery store, the movies. This is their voice!
Tips for improving your child’s communication skills at home, in school and in the community

- Help them develop ownership over their talker
- Give them time: At first they make take longer to create a sentences. The more they practice, the faster they will get at navigating those folders
- Hide objects in the home, put them out of reach but visible so they have to use their talker to request them
- When your child goes to bed, play with that talker. The more a caregiver is familiar with editing, adding, removing and changing things in the talker, more words can be added= More opportunities to communicate!
Tips for improving your child’s communication skills at home, in school and in the community

- Advocate for them to use it at school! This is their voice. It goes wherever they go. Their voice does not stay at home.
- Meet them at their level
- Make sure that your BCBA is collaborating with a Speech Pathologist as much as possible and they are both on the same page

Continue encouraging your child to use speech!
Tips for improving your child’s communication skills at home

- If possible, have a back up talker
- Have extra chargers all over your house
- Invest in a good case: An expensive case is still cheaper than a new Ipad!
NONVERBAL DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING OTHER THAN THAT PERSON HAS A DIFFERENT WAY TO COMMUNICATE.

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Questions?

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References:


