

Minspeak with Individuals with Apraxia

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More and more often young children with severe apraxia of speech are referred for AAC assessments and system recommendations following limited verbal speech production progress in early speech-language therapy intervention. This is good news!

Speech Production and Children with Apraxia of Speech

- Often have other factors influencing their ability to improve their speech production.
- Speech development can be difficult to diagnose until the child is older.
- Diagnostic difficulties and delays can result in years of traditional speech-language therapy that is only moderately successful, often resulting in frustration, "giving up," and poor self-esteem.
- Waiting until we know more about the child's disorder and what treatment is most successful wastes precious time in developing communication skills.
- The AAC system needs to support generative language and development of expressive language skills, including morphology.

Minspeak & Generative Language

The type of speech output system used for these potentially language competent children is essential. When a child clearly understands that individual words have meaning and that the way in which those words go together makes a difference in meaning, it is important that they are provided with a system that enables individual word, phrase and sentence creation to communicate what they truly wish to say and provide a more normal model for communication development. We call this generative language. Being able to put words together for specific meaning can be easily accomplished using a Minspeak language representation system. Individual words are created and combined in the order needed to convey a thought and meaning using language and speech output that "sounds like everyone else's speech" (even when synthesized speech is used).

Minspeak & Expressive Language Development

Being able to provide a speech output device to young children who are becoming more socially communicative and rapidly developing competencies in receptive vocabulary and language is important for their development of expressive communication skills now and in their future. Whether children can

eventually produce intelligible speech or not, using a speech output device that teaches them the rules for expressive language production is essential, both for short and long term outcomes. It is important that children learn how to express a message that is similar to those that they hear and understand from others in order to support their continued growth and development of communication and language skills. Minspeak systems can easily provide children with opportunity to develop all the normal syntax and morphology skills of speaking children.

Minspeak and Self-Esteem

Hearing what you mean to say or being able to correct something you said is important to all of us in terms of learning to communicate. Children who hear and understand speech and language can become frustrated when what they try to say “doesn’t sound right” or isn’t what they want to say. Using a speech output system and words that they create is important to their self-esteem and understanding of their ability to communicate. Children who don’t sound like everyone else when they communicate may choose *not* to communicate. If they have a speech output system that does not support communication consistent with what they hear from others, they may also choose not to learn how to use that system. This sometimes results in the perception that they are not *able* or *motivated* to learn it. Minspeak systems will give them the power to communicate and build self-esteem and motivation.

Minspeak and Communication Interaction

Making guesses about what children with severe apraxia of speech are saying can be a challenge and frustrating to everyone engaged in the communication interaction. The person trying to understand and guess what the child is saying often needs to be very familiar with their speech patterns as well as their interests, environments and the contexts in which their speech is used. This is tough even for parents who have the greatest knowledge about their child. It often takes only a few times for a child to try to tell you something that you can’t understand before the child “gives up” trying. Children are very specific about the way they understand how to say things and what they want to say. We need to make sure that what a child wants to say is available to them along with the way in which they want to say it.

Summary

We have an opportunity to use speech-generating systems to truly augment what children with apraxia of speech are trying to communicate, as well as to develop their expressive language skills to support their communication now and in their future. In doing this we must assure that we are providing the most language normal and rich system for them to use in this process. Using generative language in the way that Minspeak systems represent and organize it in speech generating systems makes this process easy for those facilitating its use, because it’s the way we all communicate; as well as for those who are learning to use it...because it’s the way we all communicate.

