

Developmental Apraxia of Speech Signs, Symptoms, & Tips for Parents

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Apraxia is also known as an Oral Motor Planning Disorder, Motor Speech Disorder or Childhood Apraxia of Speech. The child's oral structures are intact however; they have difficulty coordinating their facial muscles to produce speech. Their brain tries to tell the muscles what to do but somehow that message gets scrambled resulting in misarticulated sounds and unclear speech.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Lack of cooing and babbling as an infant.
- Limited number of consonant and vowel sounds.
- Pointing and grunting occurs beyond age 2.
- A child may be able to produce consonant sounds in isolation but cannot easily combine consonants and vowels.
- Uncertainty of position of tongue, teeth and lips to make sounds.
- One syllable is used to represent many words.
- Single words may be articulated well but strings of words together result in unintelligible speech.
- Some words/phrases may “pop out” with total clarity and may never be heard again. Usually, comprehension of language is intact.
- Often apraxia can occur with other speech difficulties such as oral motor weakness or drooling.

(Signs & Symptoms adapted from Nancy Kaufman's Presentation at Kaufman Children's Centre Workshop, 2001)

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Keep your child talking!!!

It is very important that your child continues to **TRY** to communicate as best as he/she can and that you praise your child for their attempts and respond to their message. Your child can quickly lose motivation to communicate verbally due to frustration with not being understood. It is important that you motivate them as best as you can so that they continue to **WANT** to communicate. The more practice they get communicating the better the outcome. With more

practice the motor speech patterns become more automatic and less effortful.

Keep your language simple, repetitive, and predictable.

When you keep your language repetitive and predictable in your daily routines your child will attempt to repeat the words, as they are familiar. It is similar to using nursery rhymes or songs with children and having them fill in words. For example, with The Wheels on the Bus, if you pause before the word ‘bus’ many children will attempt to say ‘bus’ as they know the song so well. If you make your language predictable in your routines or create songs that you use consistently, children will learn the words and may try to say them.

We want to increase the number of opportunities your child has to practice saying words by making the language environment around him/her as simple and predictable as possible. Some familiar routine phrases to model can be “I want...”, “Help me”, “Open...”, “my turn”, “more...”

Keep a list of words that your child uses.

Post this list on the fridge as a reminder to family members which words to encourage your child to continue using. Leaving it on the fridge allows you to easily add to it when your child learns a new word. Give this list to extended family members and daycare staff who spend time with your child. This will give them a chance to learn and understand the words your child is using and to provide praise to your child for their communication attempts. Again, it is important for your child to be comfortable attempting to speak **often** and in many different situations with different people. Intense practice will help speech become more automatic for your child.

Teach your child some basic signs

Teaching your child some basic signs to communicate immediate needs such as ‘drink’, ‘eat’, ‘more’, ‘all done’, ‘help’ and ‘want’ may help reduce the frustration your child is experiencing when they are attempting to communicate. You can respond to their signs as if they have spoken the words and say the word at the same time.

Keep a picture communication book handy to help during communication breakdowns.

Create a picture book with common everyday vocabulary. When your child is trying to communicate something and you don’t understand them, bring out the picture book and ask your child if he/she can find a picture of what they are talking about to help you understand. To make this communication tool effective it is important for parents and caregivers to initiate the use of this book. Children typically will not think to go to their picture book on their own. At daycare, a picture book can also be used as a communication tool for families and daycare staff to ask about things your child has done at home or at daycare. You can ask your child “Show me in your book what you did at daycare today”.

Practice, Practice, Practice

If your child is working with a Speech Language Pathologist and you have been given target words to practice at home, make sure you build in time to work on these target words. Structured practice time should be built into your daily schedule for about 10 – 15 minutes. You may need to get creative during these practice sessions to keep your child’s interest and attention on the task. The activity should be structured in that you have specific target words to focus on;

however, the activity could be physically active and engaging (e.g., hiding picture cards around a room and asking your child to find them, bring them back to you, and tell you what the picture is 3 times). Your practice time should feel like play to your child. The more practice your child gets with specific target words, the more likely those words will become automatic and less effortful.

A helpful analogy: Learning to drive a standard car.

If you practiced driving standard only occasionally it would take you a long time to learn and to build up confidence with your skill. However, if you practiced daily, you would learn the motor sequence much more quickly and be more confident in your ability to drive a standard car.

For more information talk to your child's Speech-Language Pathologist.