

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN VERBAL STUDENTS WITH DOWN SYNDROME

Summit School Parent Workshop

Speech-Language Pathologist Cathy Mhun

Are persons with Down Syndrome communicative? **YES**



Do they have good comprehension? **YES**



BUT

Do they have a hard time expressing themselves? **YES**



Do they have a hard time being understood? **YES**

WHY?

Factors non-specific to Down's:

- Intellectual level,
- Presence of additional difficulties like apraxia of speech, extreme difficulty in

coordinating sounds



Factors **SPECIFIC** to Down's:

- Low muscle tone influence voice, precision of articulation, regular breathing (can speak in spurts)
- Frequent congestion, ear infections make language input inconsistent
- Particular difficulty with short-term auditory memory: can't repeat more than a couple of items back, usually grammar stays simple
- Particular difficulty in sending SMOOTH signals from the brain to the mouth. Consequence: disfluent speech which can go from speaking too quickly to severe stuttering.

Generally speaking persons with Down syndrome have expressive skills which are **LOWER** than their cognitive level.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

INTELLIGIBILITY

Usually articulation is good at the single word level. THAT IS A GOOD BUILDING BLOCK.

We often complain that they “only use one word at a time”. Maybe this is a “safe” level where they know they can convey the gist of an idea AND they will be understood.

How to convert the single word level into intelligible and smooth sentences?

Building the sentences slowly, from one to two to three words.

Focusing on key words that give you information, not grammar.

Increasing vocabulary so that the person can express what they want to say precisely

Explaining that language uses real words, not jargon which is an imitation of speech.

Pacing with pace board or finger alternating technique has 3 advantages:

1. The sentence becomes a series of single words, which often preserves the intelligibility
2. The sentence is composed of real words and you cannot jargon one piece at a time
3. The finger alternation often prompts the person to use more words, thereby lengthening the sentence.

NEW SUPPORT METHODS

The I-Pod/I-Pad family has brought new applications which can give various levels of support depending on how demanding the environment is.

- Large Type: to type in an order and show at the counter or the table
- Tap to Talk (has pictures with phrases and voice output)
- Proloquo2Go
- Pocket SLP has tons of pictures sorted out by sound if you want the person to continue practice without childish-looking pictures
- You can also load your own pictures for the person to show: best conversational support!
- Use PhotoName or Pictello to caption your child's pictures on his iPad

Thank You!