

TOPIC: APRAXIA

DEFINITION: An inability to perform purposeful actions/ movements. It is a disorder of motor planning and sequencing. It can be seen in stroke patients as well as in young children. In young children it is often referred to as Childhood Apraxia of Speech (CAS).

While there is much debate on the cause of this in children who have not had any type of brain injury, the treatment is the same --- drill, drill, drill; practice, practice, practice. Types of apraxia include oral, verbal, and limb. Oral apraxia is when the child has difficulty imitating various movements with their lips / tongue (sticking tongue out, licking lips, blowing kisses, etc.). While the child may be able to do these things "on the fly", they will struggle and make groping motions when asked to do this on command or "imitate" an adult doing it. Verbal apraxia is when the child has difficulty producing sounds or producing the correct sounds in the correct order in words; or, they may produce the same word differently each time they say it (i.e. "animal" = 'amol', 'alinma', 'anmo', 'animal'). Limb apraxia is when an individual has difficulty coordinating arm and leg movements. Apraxia runs on a continuum from mild to severe. A child who is not talking at all or making any purposeful vocalizations/ imitations may have severe apraxia.

CHARACTERISTICS:

- Gap in receptive and expressive language skills (for example: can follow directions but does not talk)
- Limited repertoire of consonants and vowels (may produce "uh" "ah" but not "ee" "ai" "o")
- Limited babbling
- Limited intonation patterns
- Losing words previously produced
- Difficulty combining syllables
- Groping movements
- Possible uncoordinated feeding patterns
- Speech is characterized by poor intelligibility

RECOMMENDATION FOR SERVICES:

- Seek a consult or evaluation with a therapist who is experienced in treating CAS
- It is important to get early detection and early intervention as this will not just "go away". Even if your child starts talking more, there can be long term effects related to reading and spelling later down the road.

WHAT TO DO AT HOME:

- Encourage your young child to use baby signs or a gestural system and pair that gesture with a sound (example: "more" = "mmmm" + gesture/sign for 'more').
- Encourage your child to "play" with sounds and imitate these for them, consistently (example: while in bath, pop the bubbles with repeating "pop pop pop" and look at your child in a way that lets them know it is their turn and you expect imitation).
- Imitate any of your child's sounds and movements during "play" time.
- Encourage your child to imitate your vocalizations and make it fun- use a large cup or toy microphone - they like the feedback!