

Childhood Apraxia of Speech: How parents and caregivers can help.

The most important goal at home is “functional” speech and thus, “functional” language. Most likely everything up until now (assuming this is a preschooler), has been anticipated for the child. It would be beneficial if the child’s needs and desires are not immediately met until they are asked to tell you what is needed or desired. It is important to note that you will be completely helping the child to produce his/her best word approximations with maximal imitations and cues initially. There is no stress or pressure because you are helping the child to say something they are able to say with help. You can then gradually fade the cues. The best single words to teach are the foods, drinks, toys and activities the child enjoys. The phrases to teach are:

I want _____.	Let me _____.	My turn.
Help me.	Put on _____.	Take off _____.
Pick up.	Put down.	Turn on _____.
Turn off _____.	Open _____.	More _____.

“I want” might have to be “ah wah,” or “my turn” might have to be “mah tuh.” The child must learn that they will achieve desires around the house more effectively when vocalizing their best attempts at producing words. You may have to change things around the house so that they aren’t as accessible as they were. Most kids can open doors and cupboards independently. You might want to place desired items out of reach. It is the hope that if the child realizes the routine, they will “talk” on their own without waiting until you tell them or cue them. Functional attempts at home should be assisted in a playful, matter-of-fact manner (not negative or punitive). Once children have a baseline of many useful words and phrases, they will better understand the power of speaking and will probably attempt more and more “functional” language. Make sure “I want” does not become the only memorized choice of a phrase. The speech pathologist can continue to refine and integrate speech and language skills.

Additional suggestions:

- Have the child “fill-in-the-blanks” while reading familiar books or singing familiar songs.
- Help the child with best word approximations to ask for needs/desires, even if it is only the main vowel(s) of a word.
- During play, encourage imitation of different consonants and vowel patterns.
- Engage the child in familiar rhymes or songs, by humming or using a favorite syllable (such as “dah”).
- Help the child with word-retrieval through sign-language or gestures along with imitation.
- Reinforce vocal attempts with smiles, clapping, positive attention, and toys.
- Visit websites such as apraxia-kids.org or cherab.org to learn more about apraxia.

For more information about the programs available at the Kaufman Children’s Center, we invite you to contact us by phone at (248) 737-3430, via e-mail at programs@kidspeech.com, or visit our website at kidspeech.com.