

Communication Assessment and Treatment in Down Syndrome

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Outline

- Communication development in Down Syndrome
- Communication assessment
- Communication treatment



Communication development

- Spoken communication develops later in children with Down Syndrome
 - First words are often spoken after 2 years of age
 - Grammar develops more slowly than vocabulary
 - Many learn a lot of content words (for example, names of people and objects)
 - Sentences are often based on content words without grammatical forms
- There is a large range of communication in people with Down Syndrome
 - Some use very few spoken words and may communicate with technology and/or signs and gestures
 - Some may learn to speak in sentences and in multiple languages



Communication Development

- Communication development is impacted by anatomical differences and hearing loss
 - People with Down syndrome have a larger tongue in their mouth and difficulty with muscle coordination
 - They are also at higher risk for ear infections and hearing loss
 - Many people with Down syndrome will need hearing aids



Communication Assessment

- At any age, assess how they communicate
 - Speech sounds produced and syllable shapes of sound productions
 - Gesture and sign use
 - Spoken words or word attempts
 - Word combinations or sentences
 - Use of eye gaze, facial expression, and tone to communicate
- We know people with Down Syndrome have difficulty learning to use spoken language so formal or standardized assessment may not be necessary.
 - Important to describe how they communicate and consider what might help them communicate more clearly.



Communication Assessment

- Also important to assess what spoken language they understand
 - Do they recognize names of familiar people in their life?
 - Do they recognize names of familiar objects such as body parts, clothing, toys, household objects, animals?
 - Do they understand familiar action words? Location words? Descriptive words?
 - Do they follow routine instructions?
 - Do they follow one step instructions? Two step?
 - Do they point to familiar pictures when named?



Communication Assessment

- As children get older, also consider literacy
 - Do they recognize any letters?
 - Familiar signs or symbols?
 - Their own name?
 - Words?



Communication Treatment

- Total communication approach
 - Gestures, signs, sounds, spoken words
 - Possibly also pictures or technology



Communication Treatment

- If child is not producing many sounds, then focus will be on expanding sound production
 - Sound effects, animal sounds, babbling
- If child is producing sounds but words are not understood, focus on core vocabulary
 - Practice important words and phrases many times to help their mouth learn to make the sounds in the words more clearly
 - Mouth exercises are not recommended for spoken language. It is more important to focus on the production of speech sounds and the production of speech sounds in words



Communication Treatment

- If child is producing some spoken words, study their vocabulary to determine what category of words they are producing
 - Many children produce a lot of object names so consider teaching other categories of words
 - Location words, descriptive words, action words
 - Words that can be combined with words in their vocabulary
 - For example, *more, no, big,*



Communication Treatment

- If child is combining words, practice longer sentences
 - Consider adding 1-2 more words to their sentences
 - Practice familiar phrases that could be used throughout the day
 - For example *I want more X.*
- If child is producing sentences, work on connecting sentences into stories and explanations (how to play a game or make something)



Communication Treatment

- For all children, motivation can be an issue
- Focus on topics/toys of interest to motivate them
- Play activities are a great way to teach communication, especially pretending familiar routines like cooking, eating, shopping, cleaning.
- Books, songs, and familiar stories are another great teaching tool.
 - Repeating the same story/song/book helps children learn spoken language

