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## Apraxia

**Read this page to learn what apraxia is, or if you think your child might have it.**

### What is apraxia?

Apraxia is when a person has trouble saying what he wants to say. There are 2 kinds of apraxia:

- Trouble with putting together the right sounds to make words is called **verbal apraxia**. This isn't caused by physical problems with a child's tongue or mouth. But having these physical problems can make speaking harder.
- Trouble with moving your arms or hands the right way to sign is called **motor apraxia**. For deaf children, this use of their bodies is not just related to their arms and faces, but how they understand language.

Deaf children with apraxia can have trouble with both speaking and signing.

Apraxia can become harder to deal with as your child gets older. He'll want to be understood, and he may get very upset if people can't understand him. Having problems with communicating can make playing with other children hard, too.

### Signs of Apraxia

Apraxia can range from very severe to mild symptoms. Children with mild apraxia may just use short, simple words, or look like they have trouble with grammar.

Children with apraxia may have trouble with:

- Putting sounds in the right order to make words
- Using longer, more complicated words
- Chewing
- Swallowing
- Blowing bubbles
- Doing other things with their mouths.

Deaf children with apraxia who sign may have trouble with:

- Move their hands the right way when signing
- Making their hands face the right direction when signing
- Signing longer, more complicated words and sentences

### **How You Can Help Your Child**

If your child has apraxia and hearing loss, see a speech and language pathologist who knows about hearing loss AND communication problems like apraxia. Working with the speech and language pathologist, think about what your child needs to communicate, and how to help him.

Most children with apraxia can and do get better. Many different things affect how well they do:

- If your child has any other physical problems
- How much therapy your child gets
- How much help from your family your child gets

### **Speaking**

There are many different ways to help children with apraxia. They mostly try to help a child:

- Control how fast he talks
- Control the rhythm of his words
- Control how his voice rises and falls as he talks (Rhythm and melody can often help these children learn to speak).

### **Signing**

Sign language (with exaggerated movement) can help deaf children with apraxia to express themselves better. But did you know that sign language can even help hearing children with apraxia? Once a child learns a language, speech often follows. Deaf children with apraxia need to practice and repeat their signs a lot.

If your child has trouble moving his arms or hands, signing may be hard, too. For some children with [cerebral palsy](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/cp/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/cp/>), sign language takes a lot of extra work.

Some children get better if they have a way to communicate with others, even if it isn't perfect. Here are some ways that sign language can help children with apraxia:

- Sign language can help make your child less frustrated because he can express himself.
- Sign language can help slow down how fast a child talks.
- Sign language adds a clue that your child can see and be reminded of the word or idea they're trying to say.

### **Other ways of communicating**

Children with serious apraxia may have to communicate in ways besides speaking or signing. These other ways are called **augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)**.

You might be afraid that if your child uses an AAC, he'll stop trying to sign or speak. But AACs just help your child communicate better at home and at school. And having a way - any kind of way - to communicate will help your child a lot.

These are examples of AAC devices:

- A box that speaks different phrases for your child.
- Pictures that your child uses to tell you what he wants or feels

AAC devices help a child communicate at a higher level and share more information, and get better at communicating. Children who have used communication boards for a little as an hour or 2 get better at communicating.

If your child is very young, your child's speech therapist can show you how to put together different pictures to make sentences. Your child can use the pictures to tell you what he needs.

If your child is older, pictures will not be enough to communicate fully. If your child finds signing hard, find an expert in alternative ways of communicating to set up a system of communicating on the computer for your child. You can get help from these specialists for free. Read our page on [Individualized Education Programs \(IEPs\)](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/learning/rights/iep.jsp) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/learning/rights/iep.jsp>) to find out how.

### **Learn more about apraxia**

- [Apraxia Kids](http://www.apraxia-kids.org/) (<http://www.apraxia-kids.org/>)

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You can find this page online at:  
<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/apraxia/>