

WHY DOES THE PARENT HAVE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE AUDITORY-VERBAL SESSION?

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“Tell me and I will forget
Show me and I may remember
Involve me and I will understand”
Author Unknown

One of the greatest rewards for parents is being the key factor in their child reaching his/her maximum potential to integrate in the hearing world. In the Auditory-Verbal Approach the client is the parent! Parents are with their young child during most waking hours and consequently are able to create listening and language opportunities during their daily interactions. Parents know their child best and they have a sense of caring that cannot be matched. They will be the one constant in their child's future. The family is one of the most influential forces in human life; how we educate, nurture, guide and support parents will significantly impact the development of their child.

Why Parents Must Participate

Through participation in therapy sessions parents practice auditory-verbal techniques and learn to reinforce targets. They obtain the counselling, guidance and educational support to enable them to become actively involved in their child's learning thus developing a greater sense of confidence and control. Parents collaborate with the therapist in adapting play activities to their child's interests and abilities. They interpret the meaning of their child's communicative attempts. Parents serve as a communication partner in responding to a variety of linguistic features such as answering questions and using pronouns. Parents help to model communication techniques such as: turn taking, pausing, responding, and ways to promote listening and thinking. By participating, parents gain insight into the forthcoming stages of their child's development. As parents develop their skills in active and critical listening, they learn to see the constant interplay of targets. Any one event can incorporate targets in listening, speech, language, cognition and communication. Parents learn how to reinforce targets and build upon listening basics. When parents learn how to integrate auditory-verbal techniques into everyday meaningful activities and experiences, their children have the best opportunity to achieve good listening and language outcomes. Parents can become the professional's greatest allies. To ignore their contribution is to compromise a child's future.

Some therapists may discourage a parent's participation because often it is easier for a therapist to maintain control of a child without a parent in the room. However, it is not the number of teacher contact hours that develops a child's language! Nor is it the number of hours sitting at a table doing "therapy". It is not the hours sitting behind a one way mirror. It is not the quantity nor quality of toys. It is not a set curriculum dictated by boards of education (most early language learners do not have sufficient language to access that curriculum). How can a child follow academic subjects when a child is unable to request needs, explain feelings and observations, or use language to communicate and to learn? A foundation of language is developed through natural interaction about things that are meaningful and interesting to a child. In the pre-schooler's eyes, a parent's work is child's play!

Behaviour Management

A diagnosis of hearing impairment often disrupts the natural interactions between parent and child. Initially, communication may be perceived as difficult because the child, who needs to learn to listen, may be unresponsive. Parents may conclude that their child cannot understand spoken language. Eighty percent of communication in the child under three is through body language (Manolson, 1992). A parent's anxiety may cause them to be overprotective preventing their child from learning by making mistakes. A parent may demonstrate excessive affection and give in to all their child's requests in order to make life "nice" for their child. Or a parent may reinforce negative behaviour that the child has learned in order to gain attention from those he loves. This may lead to the development of behaviour problems.

Through parent participation therapists observe the parent's use of encouragement techniques, the effectiveness of their body language and their ability to positively reinforce their child's desired behaviours. There are times the therapist and parent will role-play certain challenging situations. This is very helpful for parents. Gradually parents learn behaviour management skills to enhance more natural and positive interactions. A child becomes more teachable and attends and learns more readily.

Individualised Therapy

Parents are instructed in techniques to help them be the primary language facilitators for their child. Through active participation in an individualized program, parents learn auditory-verbal techniques and strategies that are incorporated with their own needs and those of their child. This is created through ongoing assessment, teaching and parent-therapist teamwork. By individualising therapy, auditory-verbal therapists are able to adjust the program to account for the child's and parent's individual personalities, their learning styles, their interests, the degree of hearing loss and current functioning of the child. A favourable learning environment is created for both the parent and child in good acoustic conditions with few distractions from others and the child is in the presence of positive role models.

In therapy, toys need to replicate items used in natural activities in the home environment. Activities that mimic an individual family's routines and activities in the home and community promote the use of meaningful incidental language throughout their day. Children learn by a parent/caregiver integrating the structured targets that are unrecognised by the child, into daily life. When a parent and child return to their home and community, they have ample opportunities to use the skills and activities that they practised in therapy sessions, in a natural setting. If possible, it is beneficial for the therapist to make occasional home visits so that each family's home environment and living style can be considered in therapy planning.

A therapy home-type setting such as a bedroom, a living room and a kitchen help to replicate those real settings in the home. Even though parents are often nervous about children being in the kitchen, they learn that the kitchen contains a wealth of listening, vocabulary and language learning opportunities when engaged in activities such as: making cookies, pudding, playdoh, cutting vegetables and making sandwiches, or following simple recipes. Many of these activities can be recreated in any therapy room!

Anxious parents may succumb to the trap of continually testing their child. This can often lead to parent-child conflict. It is suggested that the assessment be left to the therapist, so parents can more readily follow their child's lead in play and develop mutual trust. This is challenging!

Parents learn that the Auditory-Verbal Approach is everywhere (at the park, at the train station, at the super market or anywhere in the neighbourhood). It does become a way of life.

A Developmental Approach

Too often a child and his family experience failure because therapy targets are too difficult for the child's level and do not follow a natural sequential order. In order to build on success, parents need to know how to positively reinforce attainable targets into natural play and routines. Although input is provided primarily through audition, it may be followed by body language and natural gestures when appropriate especially at a beginner's level. Visual or kinesthetic cues may be required to supplement hearing but the listening or speech target needs to be confirmed through hearing alone to facilitate learning through listening in the future.

Only through individualised therapy with parents as active participants can a therapist analyse and modify the session to most appropriately determine weekly targets. Diagnostic teaching contributes to the development of weekly, quarterly and long-term goals. These goals provide a framework for parents to learn more about their child's level of functioning and future targets. It also supports high but realistic expectations.

Parents learn by observing and listening, but mostly by doing! For any child's therapy program to be effective, parents must not just observe, but participate.

Reference

Manolson, A. (1992). It takes two to talk. A Hanen early language parent guide book. (3rd revision.) Toronto: Hanen Early Language Resource Centre.

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