

Case Study

Speech-Language Therapy to Improve the Speech-Language Prosody of Clients with Autism

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Abstract

According to the National Autism Association, autism is a bio-neurological developmental disability that generally appears before 3 years of age. This disorder affects normal development of the brain in communication skills and cognitive function. Individuals with autism usually exhibit difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, as well as leisure and play activities. These individuals may also exhibit other difficulties (e.g., allergies, asthma, sensory integration dysfunction, sleeping disorders, feeding disorders, epilepsy, sleep). "Autism is diagnosed four times more often in boys than girls." Its prevalence is not affected by race, region, or socioeconomic status." According to research, mortality risk among individuals with autism is twice as high as the general population, often related to accidents (e.g., drowning, and other accidents). At present, there is no cure for autism, but with early intervention and treatment, the diverse symptoms can be greatly reduced. According to Autism Parenting literature, the individual with autism may struggle with tone, speech rhythm and pitch, and the message or intention related to their words may be misunderstood (11/2/21).

Sentences with Rising Inflections (Raise Pitch at the End of the Sentence)

1. Do you want to go? ↗
2. Do you like pie? ↗
3. Is your name Michael? ↗
4. Can you ride a bike? ↗
5. Do you have money? ↗
6. Are you going to the movies? ↗
7. Can you help me with math? ↗
8. Did you see that picture? ↗
9. Can you come over tonight? ↗
10. Do you want to go to college? ↗

Sentences with Falling Inflections (Lower Pitch at the ends of Sentences)

1. I'll never do that again. ↘
2. She really didn't like the food. ↘
3. I think I'll go to the movies tonight ↘
4. I'll never do that again. ↘
5. I'm sorry I bought that. ↘
6. I can't come to the party next week. ↘

7. We can all enjoy the dessert. ↘
8. I do my exercises every night. ↘
9. The party was not fun. ↘
10. That story is very sad. ↘

Below is a Portion of the Poem "A Little Seed" by Mabel Watts

A little seed for me to sow,
 A little earth to make it grow.
 A little sun, a little shower,
 A little while, and then a flower.

Sequencing Pictures to be Described

The couple went into the restaurant.
 The waiter brought the menu.
 The couple chose their meal.
 The waiter brought the food, and the couple ate their meal.
 The waiter then brought dessert.
 The couple ate the dessert and then left the restaurant.

When the client can produce the content with appropriate prosody, the clinician's models may be removed, and the client can be presented with verbal material using role playing.

Relate a Short Familiar Story on material which is conducive to pitch variation (e.g., "The Three Bears). For older children, the content can be more mature with material conducive to pitch variation. Once the client is able to use appropriate prosody on content provided by the clinician, the client may relate an experience of his/her own, incorporating the techniques learned. A tape recorder can be used to illustrate to the client positive aspects of his content and to obtain his/her input of what may need improvement.

***A page from the below book was used during therapy with the client and together, the client and the therapist, would gauge where to put the intonations. ***

SOURCE: "President George Washington" by David A. Adler 2005 A Holiday House Book

George Washington was born on February 22, 1732, in a small virginia farmhouse. Virginia was an English Colony, and the People Were Loyal to King George Ii of England. The Washingtons Grew Tobacco, Fruit, And Vegetables on their Farm. Most of the Work Was Done By African-American Slaves. When George Was Seven, He Learned To Read And Write. He Studied Arithmetic Too. It Was His Favorite Subject. He Loved To Fish, Swim, And Hunt. Most Of All He Loved To Ride His Horse. When George Was Eleven, His Father Died, And He Was Now Needed To Help His Mother On The Farm. He Also Helped With His Younger Sister And Brothers. In 1751, George Was 19 Years Old. He Joined The Virginia Army And Became Soldier. The 13 Americ An Colonies Were At War With England Because They Wanted To Be Free Of English Rule. In May 1775, Leaders Of The Colonies Met And Talked About Their Fight With The English. The Leaders Chose Washington To Lead The Fight Against England. Washington's Army Won Battles In New York And Philadelphia. In 1778, The French Joined The Fight Against England. Washington's Army Won The Battles In Boston And Trenton. In 1778 M, The French Joined The Fight Against England. There Were Other Battles Too. The Americans And French Beat The English, And The Americans Would Be Free Of English Rule. In September 1783, The Americans And English Agreed To End The Fighting, And A Nation Was Born. The 13 Colonies Became The First 13 States Of The United States of America. President Washington Kept The New Nation At Peace. He Led It For 8 Years Until 1797. Then He Went Home To Virginia. In December 1799, George Washington Became Ill, And He Died That Night. People Everywhere Mourned The Death Of George Washington. It Was Said That George Washington Was "First In War, First In Peace, And First In The Hearts Of His Fellow Citizens."

Conclusion

The literature on autism confirmed a number of the characteristics displayed by the autistic client about whom the present article was written: The client is an 11-year-old male, diagnosed with autism and recommended for speech therapy, secondary to problems with prosody related to autism: He presented with an excessively slow rate of speech, which incorporated excessive pausing and lack of pitch variation. His articulation, receptive and expressive language were within normal limits for a child of his age. The plan of therapy was to improve his prosody which included appropriate speech rate, speech rhythm,

and pitch variation. Therapy began with the use of phrases and then sentences with arrows on words accompanied by clinician's models in terms of where to raise and lower his pitch appropriately. The clinician first modelled the content for the client and then had him produce the material independently. This article contains the content on which the client practiced, accompanied by indications of where to raise or lower his pitch. Once the client could read these sentences aloud with the appropriate pitch variation, he was given short poems with arrows to depict where to raise or lower his pitch. He was eventually able to read the content without a model and incorporated appropriate pitch variation, speech rate and rhythm, and pausing appropriately. It was reported that he eventually gave a talk at school (one he practiced at home) and was applauded for his presentation. Although the client made a good deal of progress, further practice will continue in terms of using appropriate prosody during spontaneous speech and other speaking activities.

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