



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER September 2022

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Transition to School

The Transition to school is often a difficult time for children and their parents. This is especially true for parents of children with communication disorders who are entering school for the first time. When a child has difficulty understanding social cues, following instructions, or processing unexpected events, the first day of school could be scary! A difficulty communicating their experience of confusion and fear would add further to their distress. Fortunately, there is a lot that parents can do to support their child's successful transition to school. Here are some suggestions for those first few weeks:

- Create a visual schedule using photos or picture symbols to prepare your child for the events of the day. Check out the website, <https://www.opensymbols.org> for free symbols.
- If your child uses a device to communicate, make sure it is always charged and at school. Share this flip book of AAC strategies with your child's teacher: https://praacticalaac.org/?wpfb_dl=308
- Give your child a pocket-sized family photo that they can pull out if they feel overwhelmed.
- Play "school" at home so that they practice new routines such as lining up, following directions and eating from a lunch box.
- Create a personalized story about going to school. Here is one example from the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board's website: <http://www.bhncdsb.ca/sites/content/files/kindeergarten/Its-Time-for-School-Social-Story.pdf>

You can help your child process and express big feelings and new experiences by preparing both your child and the environment. You've got this!

Did you know?

Speech and language disorders constitute the largest disabling condition in society (5-10%).

There is clear evidence that language intervention is effective and that the earlier treatment is begun, the better the outcome. As the language-delayed child ages, the gap between themselves and their peers widens. Thus, the longer the child's problems remain unmanaged, the more pronounced the delay becomes and the more pervasive the impact.

Ask us!

Parents are invited to ask questions that will be answered by two OAFCCD Board members. Submit your question using our Google Survey: <https://forms.gle/NCcoP7xi2hwof5cC9>. Although our survey will collect your email address, your identity will not be shared in the newsletter. The question selected for the newsletter will be answered by a parent and a speech-language pathologist. We are here for you!

From One Parent to Another Your story is important. And when you share your story as a parent of a child with a communication disorder, you create an opportunity to help and empower others. We'd like to hear from you.

My Apraxia Kids Conference Experience - I was privileged to have received a scholarship to attend my very first Apraxia Kids Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada this past July. The experience proved to be invaluable. I wanted to share my biggest takeaways with other parents. To start, it was my first solo trip without either of my children or my spouse. So the trip served 2 purposes but gave me one great advantage. I learned so much about childhood apraxia of speech to help my son and in

turn help our family. I also had a much-needed break from my family! When you have a child with special needs, self care is usually at the bottom of our to-do lists. I came home refreshed and with a sense of empowerment. I was reminded of something that deep inside I already knew but had forgotten. I was reminded that I AM the EXPERT of my child. We as parents ARE the EXPERTS of our children. I know my child better than anyone else. I am looking for the experts to give me direction in their respective fields. But when it comes to what is working or not working for my child I am HIS VOICE. What every parent feels when their child is nonverbal or has difficulty with verbal communication is a deep and lingering fear. Is he going to be okay? What if he is scared or needs something or is feeling sick how will anyone know? This can be especially scary when they are entering daycare or school for the first time. Yes there are times when we don't always know what's wrong but for the most part we know more than a school teacher who has never met him or a daycare worker who is first being introduced to him. These fears understandably can be the cause of much anxiety for many parents. We have been their voice since they were born. Then suddenly the day comes when we have to drop them off to school or daycare and we are not by their side to be that voice. This is why it is so important to use OUR voices to let our children's team know more about who they are and what they need.

On the first day of the conference one of the keynote speakers shared a great way to put things in perspective that worked for him and it seems to be working for me. Maybe it will prove the same for you. As parents we are like the General Manager of a sport's team. We want our team to win. We want our team to succeed. It is our job to ensure that the team is all working towards the same goal. We are in charge of finding the right players and the right team members. That gave me the perspective that I personally needed. School meetings and assessments with professionals can be daunting. We as parents look to the professionals to let us know what our child needs. But we must not forget that we are the experts on our child. We are their voices until they can use their own voice. And that voice always needs to be heard. Of course we

should always be open to the recommendations of the school team and professionals but when things do not seem to be working for our child we need to speak up for them. Sometimes when things are not working well we need to advocate for our children and let the team know when we need to consider another course of action or make some changes within the team. So remember that the next time you are working with your child's team and something is not working well. You are your child's greatest advocate!

The other great advantage in attending the Apraxia Kids Conference is I came to realize that my story was so much like other families' journeys. I was not alone. My son was first diagnosed with childhood apraxia of speech at around two and half years old. The diagnosis did not come easily. I heard a lot of "wait and see" along the way. Some years later he was also diagnosed with autism. Both keynote speakers had the exact same journeys. We all questioned if autism should be considered early on but at first were told the various things we noticed must be due to their lack of verbal communication or frustration for the lack thereof. Also one of the keynote speaker's is a pediatrician. He had mentioned that with all of his education and training he felt like he had missed something along the way. I too felt the same. There has always been this voice in the back of my mind that questioned if I should have known earlier? Maybe if I could have gotten him help sooner it would have made a difference? But I was like both of those keynote speakers. I did everything I could and asked questions and searched for answers just like they did. Sometimes the answers just do not come as quickly as we would have liked. But the most important thing is that we are on the right path now. That is where I see that the analogy of the General Manager of the sport's team helps me. I am surrounding my child and my family with the right players around us to help us get to our goal. It's a scary journey sometimes. We question if we are doing the right thing. We would love to have a GPS that tells us the exact directions that we need to go to get to our destination. Sometimes all we have is that North Star showing us which way through the darkness we need to go and following it.

I realized during the conference that there is a strength and an empowerment to finding people along the journey who really want to walk with you. Other parents are on the same trek. The same uphill mountain. There are also professionals dedicated to helping families like ours. There are young adults who have grown up and can now teach all of us what helped and what hindered them. Now they are their own advocates. We are not alone. There is a wealth of support in organizations such as Apraxia Kids and OAFCCD to help along the way.

Lastly, for all the parents out there along the same journey please know that no matter how much you are going through and how much you feel like most days you are just going with the flow you truly are the expert of your child. You will be their voice until the time they can use their own voice or other method of communication. Follow your child's lead and surround yourself with those individuals and professionals who are rooting for your child and your team. From one parent to another.

What can you do to advocate for children with communication disorders?

If you are not already a member, join the Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders. Membership gives you access to information about provincial funding and policy, gaps in service and opportunities for advocacy. OAFCCD participates in the Ministry consultations and partners with other provincial parent associations to advocate for improvements in special education programs and services for students. Sharing your concerns about speech and language services, will enable OAFCCD to advocate for you at the highest level of provincial advocacy. To join OAFCCD download the [Membership Application](#) and pay your \$25 membership fee. OAFCCD accepts E-transfers sent to alison.morse@outlook.com. OAFCCD receives 100% of the funds and tax receipts can be issued within 30 days. Donations to OAFCCD can also be made through [CanadaHelps](#).

Research into Virtual Care

In partnership with Empowered Kids Ontario, researchers at the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University are completing an evaluation of

virtual care services offered to children across Ontario. If your child currently receives virtual care in Ontario (or has received virtual care in the past), and you are interested in learning more about participating in this research please contact us at ekoeval@mcmaster.ca or 905-525-9140 ext. 21263

Addressing Special Education Needs in the Classroom

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) represents over 60 000 education workers including school board employed speech-language pathologists. OSSTF/FEESO is sponsoring a sector-wide symposium on inclusive education in Ontario public schools to explore issues related to special education inclusion policies and approaches. Participants will include education workers, teachers, school board decisions makers, parents and policy makers. As an important stakeholder in inclusive education, OAFCCD is excited to participate in the symposium to be held in Toronto on October 26, 2022.

Reducing Communication Barriers

The Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf has been a leader in Deaf cultural awareness and sign language services since its inception in 1979. They are offering off-site, intensive ASL workshops tailored for individual organizations as well as virtual and in-person classes for individuals. The aim of the Sign Language Services program is to reduce the barriers of communication experienced by Deaf individuals by promoting the use of American Sign Language within the hearing community. If interested, register for lessons, inquire about services, or learn more about the institution by visiting www.bobrumball.org.