

Children with Limited Verbal Skills

Teacher Training Article • Fall 2020 • Jessica Stickler



Description

Children with limited verbal skills have difficulty expressing themselves using speech. Nonverbal students are not able to communicate using speech. Verbal nonverbal students have a lot to say but often do not understand how to integrate in social situations. These children do not understand body language or facial expressions very well. They may laugh at inappropriate comments or take jokes literally.

Characteristics

Children with limited verbal skills have trouble understanding what they read. They may have difficulty with motor skills. Physical movement may be awkward and unsure. Fine motor activities can also be difficult (coloring, writing, cutting with scissors).

They may fear new situations or be predisposed to social anxiety. Making and keeping friends is often a challenge. They may have diagnoses such as attention deficit disorder (ADD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). (Refer to the ADD and ASD resource guides for additional information.)

Students with limited verbal skills may learn sign language or use an assistive communication device, such as an iPad, to help them communicate.

Andrew's Story (as told by Jessica Stickler)

A boy we will call Andrew is a sweet six-year-old with an ornery gleam in his eyes. He loves to sing, dance, listen to stories, and spend time with his friends. One of his favorite things to do is swing!

Andrew cannot speak except to utter sounds and a few one-syllable words. He also has several physical disabilities. He uses a walker to help him move around the classroom. At school, he has a one-on-one paraprofessional that helps him with his daily tasks.

Andrew is learning how to use an iPad to help him communicate. The special education teachers at his school are teaching him how to make choices on the iPad by choosing between two pictures. His teachers and parents are also using picture cards and sign language with him.

Everyone loves Andrew. He is a social butterfly. When he does not use his walker, he likes to scoot around the room on his bottom to say hello to his friends. His friends talk to him and use sign language to communicate with him. Even though his little hands are gnarled, Andrew does his best to respond back to his friends. Often, you'll see him blowing kisses! He has been successful learning how to make choices

and pointing to pictures to give answers to questions and express his desires. He is a joy to have in class and has been a blessing to so many!

Accommodations and Supports

If the child has difficulty grasping pencils or cutting with scissors, ask a peer to assist him during classroom activities or have crafts pre-cut for him. This will assist with his ability to participate. A rotating group of peers may also serve as a "learning buddy" each week to help with social interaction and support.

Nonverbal children may have trouble with their gross motor function, even to the point of being unable to sit on the floor during a group activity. If this is the case, have a chair, stool, or beanbag available for them.

Create a predictable environment with a set schedule of events so they will know what to expect and what comes next. Supply a visual schedule to help with transitions. This can be a small personal schedule or a large classroom schedule.

Offer students choices with pictures to assist their learning and your understanding of what they need or want. Keep pictures on a ring or Velcro board so they are easily accessible. Offer only two choices at a time so as not to overwhelm the child.

Assistive communication devices are great tools for students with limited communication, but pictures work well too. Story boards or flannel boards can be useful.

Smartphones and tablets can be great tools, and there are many useful apps for communication. Some of these apps offer story boards that can be used for Sunday school lessons and visual schedules.

Offer the child a seat in the front of the room or close to the teacher so she can more easily see what is happening. This gives her a better visualization of props, pictures, and sign language.

Warn students of changes before they happen to lessen anxiety.

Modify difficult assignments; make things clear and concise.

If you have sign language interpreters in your church, this may be a great tool to use in Sunday school. If you are unable to find an interpreter, go online and use a sign language dictionary like www.signingsavvy.com to look up key words for the lesson. This website offers video tutorials for specific words.

Resources

If the child has an IEP (Individualized Education Program) at school, and if the parents are willing to share it with you, you can learn what the school is doing to support the child. A Spiritual IEP created in partnership between Word Aflame Curriculum and ABLE Ministry can also help facilitate conversations with parents.

NOTE: Nonverbal or children with limited verbal skills may not have an IEP.

Website: Understood: For Learning and Attention Issues (<https://www.understood.org>)

Website: Learning Disabilities Association of America (<https://ldaamerica.org>)

Website: Child Mind Institute (<https://childmind.org>)

Web Article: “Seven Assistive Communication apps in the iPad App Store” by Tzvi Schectman, posted on www.friendshipcircle.org

Website: Signing Savvy Video Dictionary (<http://www.signingsavvy.com>)

Book: *Raising NLD Superstars: What Families with Nonverbal Learning Disabilities Need to Know about Nurturing Confident, Competent Kids* by Marcia Rubinstien and Pamela Tanguay

Book: *Nonverbal Learning Disabilities at Home: A Parent's Guide* by Pamela Tanguay

Book: *Learning about Learning Disabilities* by Bernice Wong

Connect with ABLE

If you have questions regarding special needs, contact ABLE (Accepting, Believing, Loving, Embracing). ABLE Ministry is a program of the Ladies Ministries Division of the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI) and is dedicated to assisting the special needs and disabled populations within the church and the community. ABLE is committed to increasing awareness about disabilities in the community, the church, and the world. They strive to provide the strength, support, and assistance necessary to meet the needs of those affected by disabilities—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Facebook: ABLE Ministry UPCI

Website: <http://ladiesministries.com/programs/able>

For further information, email ladies@upci.org or call 636-229-7895



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