

Nancy Cader

Capable of So Much More

Last fall I met with John H., Helen (mom) and John's BSC to review our approach to John's goal of increasing communication. This was one of my first real times working with John directly and I was very unsure about his current level of functioning. John has Rhett's and outwardly appears to have a very limited repertoire of functional skills. Before going to the meeting I was told that John had a communication device that was being used inconstantly due to John's high amount of stimulatory behaviors. During the meeting I asked if John wanted to use the device to talk with us. John said, "Yeah." He can sign and say a few words. I asked him a series of questions about his day and he was able to scroll through a series of 4 or 5 menus to answer each question accurately. It was clear at that point that John was capable of so much more than anyone was giving him credit for. I continued a conversation with the BSC and Helen about how his device could be worked into his day to day routine to give John a voice and an opportunity to share his thoughts and feelings about his world. During this time I noticed that John was still scrolling through the menus looking for something. It was at that point that John, with his device, said, "I want to ask a question" and looked at me. I replied, "Sure John, what's your question?" After about a minute of searching through the menus John asked, "What is your name?" I told him my name and explained why I was there that day and John's face lit up. He then verbalized, "Thank you." This was the first time I was ever truly able to have a conversation with John.

John's mother, Helen, is now aggressively working with the school to secure a newer, less cumbersome, device (I believe the Dynavox V). On Wednesday she showed me the prescription letter the speech therapist submitted to the insurance company. Since that time last fall I have seen a big change in the family as a whole. They originally thought using this alternate form of communication was a hopeless project but have now seen the merit to helping their son find his voice.

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