

PROMPT for Young Adults: Developing Appropriate Communication Focuses

Communication focuses are the types of activities we focus our lexicon, the set of words we work on in therapy, around. Some examples of communication focuses are: play skills, work skills, daily routines, and academics. Younger children typically learn best through play-based activities. When working with a young adult, it is important to identify a communication focus that is appropriate to the client's life and will facilitate functional use of the vocabulary/lexicon.

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For older children, the communication focus will most likely be academics, work skills, or daily routines. Activities should be modified to meet the cognitive level of the client. The lexicon and activities should be based on the client's level of functioning in the 3 communicative domains: cognitive-linguistic, social-emotional and physical-sensory. The physical-sensory goals pertain to the motor act of speech. The cognitive-linguistic goals pertain to the complexity of the language and concepts. Social-emotional goals pertain to how the client will use the words to communicate (requesting, directing, responding to questions, etc.) The activities must be repetitive and predictable in order to facilitate motor learning and spontaneous speech.

An example of an activity appropriate for a young adult would be preparing a meal such as pizza. The act of making a pizza will vary based on the individual's cognitive level. It can be as basic as just putting the ingredients on the pizza to more complex steps such as following a recipe and setting the oven. The social-emotional goals will reflect how the client is going to interact while making the pizza such as requesting each ingredient or narrating/commenting on what they are doing. The physical-sensory goals will reflect what the client will verbalize and will vary depending on the motor speech goals. It can be as basic as turning on the voice for "ah"/on to 'put on' each ingredient, or more complex such as using lingual (tongue) movements for "I need it"/"I don't need it" to indicate if an ingredient is needed or not. Parents who would like to do this type of activity at home with their teens should stay up to date on the motor speech goals and lexicons that their PROMPT therapist is using in regular sessions. By matching the words used in therapy with the words used in home program activities, parents can reinforce vocabulary and concepts and be sure that the words they are using are appropriate for their teen's level of motor ability.

Selecting an age appropriate and functional activity is key when working with young adults. The activity must be relevant to their daily life and routine and be fun and interesting enough to keep them engaged. The activity should to encompass all 3 communicative domains, be reinforcing and have value to the young adult. Activities of daily living (ADLs) are very beneficial as the client is working on becoming more independent and can use the lexicon to interact during naturally occurring activities.