

Childhood Apraxia of Speech

Information for Parents and Teachers

What is Childhood Apraxia of Speech (CAS)?

CAS is a childhood speech sound disorder in which children have difficulty programming, sequencing and initiating movements required to make speech sounds. CAS in children can be known by various names. These include:

- **Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia**
- **Verbal Apraxia**
- **Apraxia of Speech**
- **Apraxia**

Childhood Apraxia of Speech or CAS is the preferred term used by most specialist organisations in Australia and the US.

CAS is usually described as being mild, moderate or severe in nature. A child may have no words, very few words, or up to 100 - 200 words in their vocabulary. They are unlikely to be attempting to make more than a handful of two-word combinations.

How is CAS different from other speech disorders?

Although characteristics may overlap, CAS is a *motor speech planning disorder* and should not be confused with other speech sound disorders observed in children such as functional speech and phonological disorders. Functional speech disorders and phonological disorders usually arise when children develop normal speech sounds and patterns at a slower rate than their peers. Typical speech disorders usually present with consistent errors and respond well to intervention. However, children with CAS present with highly inconsistent errors and despite a great deal of therapy, a child's speech difficulty may persist.

Characteristics of CAS

CAS has many features that can distinguish it from other speech disorders. Some of these include:

- Limited vocabulary;
- Oral 'groping' or 'trial and error' when trying to say a sound;
- Highly unintelligible speech;
- Inconsistent speech patterns (may say the same word in different ways)
- Trouble imitating sounds;
- Trouble with vowels as well as consonants;
- Difficulty with sequencing words and sounds in words;
- Comprehension skills are usually more advanced than expressive language skills;
- Peculiar rhythm in speech.

How is CAS diagnosed?

CAS is usually diagnosed by a Speech Pathologist. Assessment involves a detailed speech and language assessment that includes analysing speech movements, sounds, patterns and rhythms.

There is no particular age at which a definite diagnosis of CAS can be made because speech and language difficulties present similarly at a young age.

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Prognosis

It is difficult to predict the outcome of intervention for CAS as there are numerous factors likely to influence progress. Some of these factors are:

- Severity of the problem;
- Age at which intervention commenced;
- Co-existing health, cognitive, attention, speech and/or language problems;
- Opportunity, commitment and motivation to practice outside the clinical setting.

Due to the complexity of its nature, intervention for CAS typically occurs over a long period of time. Some children with CAS may make improvements in their speech whilst others may require alternative methods to communicate despite all efforts.

Help and Support

Victorian school systems including State, Private and Independent schools provide support services and most schools have access to a Speech Pathology program. Private Speech Pathology Services are also available for families and schools to access support.

The Program for Students with Disabilities provides funding support for children attending state schools in Victoria. For a student to be deemed eligible for assistance through this program a detailed formal assessment process is required.

Your local school or health provider will be able to offer assistance as to what services are available and best suited to a child's needs.

Useful Websites

Australian Dyspraxia Association Inc. (ADA)
The Childhood Apraxia of Speech Association (CASANA)
Speech Pathology Australia
Caroline Bowen PHD (Speech-Language Pathologist)

www.dyspraxia.com.au
www.apraxia-kids.org
www.speechpathologyaustralia.org
www.speech-language-therapy.com/phonol-and-artic.htm

Lewis & Lewis

Lewis & Lewis Psychological Consulting Services
PO BOX 476 Brunswick Victoria 3056 Tel: (03) 9380 5742 Fax: (03) 9380 6883
Email: info@lewisandlewis.com.au Website: www.lewisandlewis.com.au