

Postural needs for effective communication

A Mother's Journey

Shona's interests had been in sculpture and community work but when her second daughter was born with cerebral palsy, unable to speak and almost totally deaf, doctors and therapists advised Shona to put her in a home and rather have another baby.

Understandably Shona was shocked at this advice, and refused to accept it. Instead, she was determined to start building a positive future for her daughter.

When Shelly was getting too heavy to carry, Shona saw pictures of a special seating support electric wheelchair in a Swedish magazine and made contact with the bio-medical engineering department at UCT to build a similar machine.

This led to the first SA battery-powered buggy, and provided the foundation of Shonaquip CC. The buggy gave Shelly great freedom and enabled her to attend a local pre-school, where, with all the stimulation she received, she progressed rapidly on to primary and then high school.

Throughout Shelley's school career Shona was very aware of the fact that communication was key for Shelley's interaction, acceptance and education.

Shona realised early on with Shelley that unless she was correctly seated none of the above could happen.

Shona started an NPO for children who could not speak. This gave her the opportunity to meet many other parents of children with disabilities.

It was these Parents who together with their therapists who badgered Shona into designing and manufacturing special devices for them.

With Shonaquip officially registered, Shona continued to design different products to meet the needs of the children she met, working on just one item at a time and improving the designs as she went along.

Shona's inspiration was Shelly and her focus communication, interaction and inclusion.

With this always in mind Shona's range of products grew rapidly.

These words by Bob Williams ring true....Every person, regardless of the severity of their disability, has the right and ability to communicate with others, express everyday preferences and exercise at least some control over their daily life

Each individual, therefore, should be given the chance, training, technology, respect and encouragement to do so

These words link with the Communication Bill of Rights...

which was put forth in 1992 by the National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities, and emphatically states....

All people with a disability of any extent or severity have a basic right to affect, through communication, the conditions of their existence.

All people have specific communication rights in their daily interactions.

Three of those rights categorically state that individuals who have disabilities have the right to.....

- Receive intervention to improve communication skills
- Have access to AAC and other assistive technology devices and services at all times
- Have AAC and other AT devices that function properly at all times

Based on this we need to ask ourselves how positioning affects

Postural needs for effective communication

Head alignment

Spinal alignment

Comfort

Incorrect head alignment negatively influences

- Breathing
- Swallowing
- Hearing



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- Eye contact

Incorrect spinal alignment negatively influences

- Breathing
- Hand function
- Vocalisation
- Eye contact
- Environmental awareness

Discomfort and pain negatively influences

- Breathing
- Hand function
- Concentration
- Balance
- Interaction

AAC supplements the individual's existing communication

1. vocal
2. gesture
3. body language

These factors need to be seriously considered in view of positioning

The positive affects correct seating and positioning has on communication

- Positive, proactive interaction
- Independence and function
- Opportunity
- Eye contact
- Hand function
- Environmental awareness



These positively affect.....

- Relationships
- Health
- Safety
- Self determination
- Participation in education
- Participation in family life
- Employment opportunities
- Independence

It is important to remember....

Collaboration is a vital component. One person cannot adequately develop the whole array of elements and strategies necessary for an effective AAC system.

Team work is key!



Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

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