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Early Communication Skills for Children with Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals

Libby Kumin
Woodbine House (Jun 13, 2012)
Softcover $26.95 (391pp)
978-1-60613-066-7

For children with Down syndrome, communicating effectively is just as urgent and essential as it for anyone else, notes Dr. Libby Kumin, in a revised edition of her outstanding guide for parents and professionals.

"[T]here really is no such thing as 'Down syndrome speech,'" she writes, adding that many factors can affect the speech and language skills of children with Down syndrome, and there are numerous tactics to helping with specific communication problems.

Kumin brings formidable breadth and depth of experience to the task of explaining language acquisition and offering suggestions for working through challenges. She's a professor in the Department of Speech-Language Pathology/Audiology at Loyola University in Maryland, and the founder of the Down Syndrome Center for Excellence. An earlier book, *Helping Children with Down Syndrome Communicate*, focused on children ages six to fourteen.

In this important guide, she delves into the crucial early years, when children first acquire language and learn meaning and grammar. Written for a non-medical audience, *Early Communication Skills for Children with Down Syndrome* expertly breaks down language development, from infancy through toddlerhood. Kumin includes basic concepts, but also activities that can boost success. For example, she suggests ways that parents can help children participate in reading, such as encouraging children to pantomime the actions of a book's characters.

In this third edition, Kumin has broadened information on the needs of children with childhood apraxia of speech, and also covers a dual diagnosis of Down syndrome and autism. She's updated terminology, more fully covers the benefits of technology, and addresses special education law.

An enclosed CD-ROM makes the book even more useful. The disc contains forms for recording early communication milestones, for developing treatment plans, and for evaluating specific aspects of language like intelligibility. It allows parents and professionals to track progress in a comprehensive, focused way, as well as providing the necessary materials for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), two documentation forms often used by organizations and service agencies that focus on children with disabilities.

Kumin provides a wealth of research on proven language acquisition strategies, but it's her warmth and insight that makes the book truly stand out. Although her work can (and should) be used by professionals, she speaks most directly to parents, and does an admirable job of providing both intellectual rigor and emotional support.

She gently emphasizes that there are many sensory, perceptual, physical, and cognitive problems that can occur with Down syndrome, each affecting the development of communication skills. Addressing a child's unique challenges is crucial to overcoming these issues as much as possible, and Kumin acts as expert advisor to parents, giving them encouragement and comfort in addition to practical strategies. The result is an authoritative, friendly guide that should prove to be a well-loved resource for anyone who wants to help children with Down syndrome be heard and understood.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (October 22, 2012)

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