

The “All About Me” Book

How to Share Information About Your Child with New People

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When my child with apraxia was ready to transition from a wonderful preschool into our elementary school system, I must admit that I was terrified. The preschool staff and his private speech language pathologist had a very nice team approach in place and my son was thriving. His speech and language were improving. His ability to communicate with other children and the adults at school had changed enormously. He was happy and well adjusted. And now we had to start over. Gosh, I had fears about that!

I’m sure that the book I describe would be effective any time that new adults are working with a child. I developed the “All about Me” book in 1996 because, basically, I was scared to death that my son was starting kindergarten and I would not be able to watch what was going on like I had done when he was in preschool. I also had a strong desire to insure that people who were working with my son not only understood his problems, but also had the opportunity to see the wonderful little boy there!

I created a questionnaire that I distributed to all who knew, cared about, and loved my son. This included relatives such as his favorite aunt and his grandma, friends, teachers, therapists, etc. (not just professionals who worked with my son) My questions were modified questions from a planning tool called McGill Action Planning Systems (MAPS) which was developed by Marsha Forest and her colleagues. I was fortunate enough to have known Marsha Forest and understood the power of the MAPS planning tool. (For more information see www.inclusion.com)

I crafted and selected specific questions for individuals to answer about my son. Easily, families can adapt the questions posed to family and friends who know their child best.

Who is my son? (Describe his special attributes, qualities, descriptive terms – the things that make him uniquely him!)

What are his special talents, abilities, etc?

What are his most pressing needs at this time?

What kinds of things are guaranteed to motivate, engage, and enthrall him?

What kinds of things are guaranteed to cause him upset, anxiety, concern?

If I could tell my sons new team at Kindergarten one very, very important thing about him, what would it be?

Everyone who received the questions turned in their questionnaires and then I compiled the answers into one combined, attractive booklet that listed the questions and responses. I also insured that responses were not duplicated and similar responses were grouped together. In the end, it was a

booklet of the combined answers to the questionnaire from the people who knew my son the best. Optionally, I know some parents also insert a photo into their child's All About Me document.

I made copies of our All About Me book and distributed them at our first meeting with the new school. My son's private SLP attended the meeting, as did the director of my son's private preschool. The SLP brought a video of the first time that he worked with my son and showed a clip of it to the new team. They had just met my son briefly before the meeting as he toured the Kindergarten room. They were shocked to see how far this child had come in two years of therapy and they became quite intrigued with him.

In the end, many people who worked with my son during his Kindergarten year and over the next several years told me that the All about Me book was the most accurate and helpful piece of "paperwork" that they had received. Since my child is a child with gads of paperwork following behind him, I took this as a compliment! There are many variations of the described project – the concept of helping others get a more complete view or picture of your child. Again, the idea of All About Me was to capture some of the wisdom of the people who knew and loved my son and to help the new team of professionals see him as a whole child, not just a child with special needs or problems.

(Sharon Gretz is the founder of the Childhood Apraxia of Speech Association and Apraxia-Kids Resources. She has her master's degree in education/counseling and is a Ph.D. student in Communication Disorders and Sciences.)

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