

How to use Mr. Potato head in speech therapy

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We have written a few posts in this series, explaining how we use 'normal' toys to target specific speech and language skills. You can read our posts about using dinosaurs, toy animals, Lego, and Nerf guns. Many younger children find Mr. Potato head very motivating. They also now make a whole range of extra parts and clothes as well as special edition ones. So here are some ideas about using it in therapy.

Requesting

I find that Mr. Potato head is a great tool for encouraging early interaction and requesting skills in younger children. It is often a motivating toy, so I am mean and keep all the parts in a tub! So if the child wants to add something they have to ask/request. If the child isn't yet talking I will wait until they make eye contact or pull on my hands. From here you can encourage early words such as 'more' to make the request.

Single word understanding

A quick word of caution for both understanding and naming the body parts with Mr. Potato head – many of the parts look odd, so if your child isn't getting it right, it may be because they don't associate an orange circle with a nose!

However, to help understanding of single words and early body vocabulary, you can hold up 2 pieces and ask them “Where’s hand?”. If they take the hand, praise them. If they take the other option, take it away and offer the hand and name it again. You can also extend this by asking the child to then find their nose or hand.

You can even work this into tidying up. Again I keep hold of the tub and with all the parts on the floor I ask for specific items to be put in. Keep your requests simple “Where’s eyes?” or just “eyes”. When the child has the correct part they can put it in the tub.

Naming body parts

If you are working on your child saying the word, hold up the item and get them to say what it is before they can take it. If you can find some of the extra clothing/ body part packs you can work on even more words!

Prepositions

This can be a little tricky, so only work on this if your child is ready. Mr. Potato head lends itself to prepositions such as above/ under/ next to, which can be harder for young children. However, if these are prepositions you are working on it is great. You can give the child instructions such as “Put the nose below the eyes”. You can also do silly faces and give instructions such as “Put the arm under the mouth”.

If you wanted to work on early prepositions such as in/ on, you can still do this. You will need to take the pieces and hide them around the room – arm on chair, eyes in box etc. Then when your child has either followed the instruction (comprehension) or told you where the piece is (expression) they can put the item in the potato.

Linking words

You can talk about the parts as you put them in using 2 words e.g. blue hat, green shoes. This does need some colour understanding, so make sure your child is secure with the colours of the items before you try and link the colour and object name. You could extend this and use a starter phrase such as “I want.....”

I’m sure there are other ways to use it, but these are the main skills I target! What else do you use Mr. Potato head for?

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