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DEVELOPING NATURAL LANGUAGE WITH CUED SPEECH

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>> SARINA ROFFE: For those of you coming in late, we have some handouts in the front. You can get them now or later, whichever you want.

Ok. My name is Sarina Roffe, and I am a parent of a cuer. I am also the Executive Director and Past President of the National Cued Speech Association. We're here to talk about developing natural language using Cued Speech, which is a communication mode developed in 1966. I am a writer. I am pretty well‑known in the Cued Speech realm because of my parenting and my writing about parenting of a child who was born profoundly deaf.

Developing natural language. We say in our community "Just cue it." So what does that mean to develop natural language with a child who is deaf or hard of hearing? Well, cueing builds an internal understanding of the spoken language.

Now, what does that mean exactly? If you are a hearing child, you babble. You hear language around you. You have access to the spoken language. And you gradually develop the building blocks for that language. You will speak with one word. Then you will put two words together, eventually building up into sentences. And there will be language milestones that build into language. You will learn to understand the structure of spoken language. You will learn to internalize that into a language model. Ok?

So we want to take those same building blocks which when a child goes to school, becomes the foundation for literacy because then they're taking that same language that they learned and internalized. And then when they go to learn to read, they're just learning another form of that language. They're learning the written form of the language they already know. And then the Cued Speech community, that's exactly what we're trying to do. We're giving a visual access to the spoken language in such a way that the child has complete information and with that complete information develops language, the structure of language internally, the structure of the spoken language internally, and then it's able to use that for literacy.

So it's very important ‑‑ one of the things that I say is that it's very important that parents don't dumb down their language. Ok? You don't need to point to things and gesture to them. It's important to say what they are and use proper names. Your home is the laboratory of learning. It's where language grows. It's where language develops. Everything about your language comes from your home. And that's the greatest starting place in the world.

Cue babble whatever your child says. When you're bathing your child, cue the babble back and forth to them so that they know that you understood what they were saying. Cue colors. Not just the basic colors but colors like magenta and lilac. Right? Build the language by enriching the language. You don't just talk about brushing your teeth. Don't you want your teeth to be pearly white? You enhance the language that you use by using more colorful language.

Name objects. When you're loading the dishwasher, talk about how you load the dishwasher because it's not just getting a child to do a one‑step direction. It's getting them to do a two‑or three‑step direction. Help me put the dish on the top shelf of the dishwasher. Right? Now it's the dish, the dishwasher and the top shelf of the dishwasher, understanding all of those directions.

Sing and cue the alphabet, Nursery Rhymes. Rhyming is a tremendously important basic skill needed for literacy. Identify items and change their names. Use different words to say the same thing. Angry is frustrated, disappointed, upset.

Identify ‑‑ add colorful words and more identifying features. So it's not just a couch. It's a blue couch or the couch has a paisley print on it. Count objects and use numbers. Body parts, farm animals, zoo animals. Talk about how things are the same, how things are different. Talk about different ways to develop ‑‑ different things in your language. Enrich the language that you say and that builds language.

And, again, for us it's “Just cue it.” But we'll talk more about that.

Make it about your child. A child is interested in things about them. When my son was little, we used to go to McDonald’s, literally, and I would take the paper wrapper ‑‑ in those days we had those Polaroid photographs that printed out. I would literally put them in a book and I would sequence them. First we went to McDonald’s. Then we ordered fish and fries. And then we ate it. We sat at a table and ate it. Then we went home. So I had now a four‑sequence item. He knew the sequence. It was about -- it was about something he enjoyed. Maybe I added that he played in the playground in McDonald’s. Those kinds of things make it about your child. But talk about also your child's emotions, how they feel, if they're upset.

I remember one day my son had lost his shoe. He was very upset about this shoe. His teacher taught me the strategy that I still use today with my grandchildren. And that was, as he was upset about it I was like, oh, you lost your shoe. He couldn't express to me but I kept saying to him: Yes, you lost your shoe; I know, you lost your shoe; you're upset you only have one shoe. So you're validating for the child their emotions. You're validating what they're feeling. And that's an important part of growth. Because now they know that you understand what's going on in their lives. Ok? And you're giving them the words to say how they feel. You're giving them the words by saying, yes, you're upset; you lost your shoe. You're giving them the words. You're giving them the language for how they're feeling so that they know that you understand. Ok?

Capitalize on your child's interests. Maybe you have a child who is interested in soccer. Maybe it's baseball. Maybe it's ballet. Whatever the interest is of your child, capitalize on it. Build on it. Use that as a language‑learning tool by talking about whatever their interests are.

Listen to hearing children communicate among themselves and listen for phrases you wouldn't normally say and work them into your vocabulary. So I learned this because I used to volunteer at my child's preschool. And I would hear things that the other kids said. I was a lot older than those kids but that taught me 3 and 4‑year‑old language. By listening to what the other kids said in the preschool, I understood what was relevant in the lives and what was important in the lives of those 3‑year‑old kids. So if you listen to the other kids, you hear what's going on and you're able to work that into the language that you use with your own child.

Cue sounds in the environment, especially with Cochlear Implant children because it validates what they hear. What do I mean by that? Does the doorbell go ding‑aling or ding‑dong? Birds chirping outside, sounds that are in their environment, the fire engine, sounds in their environment that they may or may not pick up with their implant. But also, it validates what they're hearing. Because maybe they're not making complete sense of it but when you cue it, it validates and helps them understand what they heard.

Don'ts, big don't. Don't use baby language. Baby language doesn't help you develop language. A pacifier is a pacifier. It's not a ba‑ba. It's a pacifier. Don't dumb down your language. Don't simplify it. Don't point to things. Use the words for what you want to say and you will build language.

Don't forget manners. Don't think that just because a child is deaf or hard of hearing they don't need to learn to say please and thank you and you're welcome and use their manners. Ok? You need to have the same expectations for your deaf or hard of hearing child as you would for a hearing child. Children need to learn manners just like anybody else does because you don't get far in life if people think that you're rude.

Enrich your language. So, we want to use prepositions, opposites, off, under, on, near, next to. Use adjectives. Not only does a dog have a tail but the tail is bushy or the tail is thin or the tail is fluffy. Patterns. A pattern can be plaid or striped or solid. He's wearing a flowery shirt. Talk about how things smell. Talk about their texture, tough, sandy, rough. Use brand names. Kids use brand names today. Do you have Nike sneakers? What are you wearing? What brand? Recognize that brands are important for children. Use the names of toys and the names of the people in the cartoons your children watch. Dora The Explorer, Jake and the Neverland Pirates. Whatever is current today. I think those are actually two or three years old already.

Take field trips to build on language. So, say in cue, for example, the names of their animals. Talk about their habitats. Go to the supermarket with a list and get the items on the list. I need ‑‑ we need to go to the supermarket and buy three oranges, four apples, a quart of milk, and some orange juice. And go and say, “Let's get three apples. Can you count three apples and put them in the bag? Can you count four oranges? Where is the milk section? Where would we find the milk? The milk is in the dairy section.” And teach them all of those things.

Talking and cueing to your child builds language. And the more the language acquired, the stronger the foundation for literacy.

Use and expect language and you get language. If you don't expect it, you don't get it. Once the children understand language, you must expect them to use their words to tell you how they feel, to tell you what they want. Use your words.

As language builds, expect expressive speech, especially with questions. Ok? So you want to start asking questions. You want the child to ask you questions because that's a level in the path to good language development.

I remember a parent asking me once: When is my child going to start asking me why questions? And when the child started asking me why questions it was like, Wwhen is he going to stop asking me why questions? [Laughter]

So again, I talked about directions. Put the bowl in the dishwasher. Put the bowl on the top shelf of the dishwasher. Get the bowl from the table and put it on the bottom shelf of the dishwasher.

So you see how many directions are in that? That is all part of building and having a child understand language. Language in equals language out.

Discourse. So, a crucial element for building language is discourse, the conversation, the give-and-take. That's a crucial element in language. So if you ask questions, expect answers to your questions.

Listen to your child and answer them. Maybe repeat back what they said to me. You're asking me X. You're asking me if you can have ice cream after school. Yes, you can have ice cream after school. So you repeat the question. It's a strategy to make sure so that they know you understood rather than just saying yes. And that way they understand that you understand.

It also helps them process the language when you repeat back what they said. Discuss things at his or her level but don't simplify what you're saying. And when your child is upset about something, validate their feelings.

So, I wanted to show you a video clip. It's some children cueing. And I want you to look for certain things. First of all, this is exposure to language from a sibling. And parents able to communicate and discipline. Use of cueing between two deaf cuers and the mother's use of idiomatic language. There's a hearing child in the video who is correcting the deaf child's use of vocabulary. And the child says ‑‑ he says, “It's buddy not bunny.” The deaf child corrects another deaf child on the video with the pronunciation of the word film. Playing with sounds of language and making nonsense words. I hope you understand it.

I think I have to go over to the video. I hope you can see this.

Ok. Fast forward. This is Hillary Frankland and she's grown up now. She still likes playing with language.

Oops what did I do? Here we go.

>> I'm interested in words. I don't think I've ever had that.

>> SARINA ROFFE: So literacy. What's the first step to literacy? Knowing the language, learning the language, internalizing the language, experiencing the language, being bathed in the language, practicing the language, using the language in conversation and have repetition, consistency, frequency and intensity. Children do not learn the language efficiently through print alone. They simply don't. If they're first approaching English or American educational system where we learn in English through print alone, it's not going to be as effective because the language isn't the same as when they've internalized. So know the language before you start to read.

So, what does cueing provide? Cueing provides accessible communication. It's an easy system to learn for hearing parents because it takes two days or about 12 to 15 hours to learn. It provides complete visual access to the spoken language. And I'm sure you're all waiting for a demonstration. And I'm going to give that to you.

Ok. So the way cueing works is the following. There are four positions around the face, the side position, mouth position, chin position, and throat position. Each of those positions represents a group of consonant sounds. So, for example, at the mouth position you would have the sounds for ee and ur. So watch me because I'm going to turn off my voice.

Now, what you see there is I used the same cue for both sounds. Because in Cued Speech what looks alike on the lips looks different on the hand and what looks alike on the hand looks different on the lip. The mouth is part of the message.

So now watch when I add some consonants. This handshake represents the consonant sounds for m, f, t. So watch when I add those.

Now, all six of those looked different. And my hand was all the same at all six sounds.

Now what happens when I cue something in which the sound looks the same on the lips.

So we have meet, peat, beat. Watch this.

Now the difference is on my hand. Because the lips look the same. So what looks alike on my hand will look different on the lips and what looks alike on the lips will look different on the hand.

And I can cue anything, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious, and the deaf child would not only know what I've cued but how to pronounce it. They will be able to determine because we cue how we talk. They can understand the difference between a Massachusetts accent and a South Carolina accent. Do you say y'all or you all? Do you say 33rd Street or tirty‑tird street? Does the doorbell go ding‑aling or ding‑dong?

You can cue anything after you've learned this close system of phonemes. Once you put them together, you can learn anything. You're no longer pointing to cereal boxes but now you're saying, Do you want Capt’n Crunch cereal? And now you don't have to dumb down your language.

As a mom, I dumbed down my language. I fully admit it. And when my son was 17 months old, after three years in early intervention, he had 150‑word vocabulary, the equivalent of a 17‑month‑old. We started to cue. We were in the right place at the right time. There was a Cued Speech program. We're very lucky to be introduced to it by some other parents in our area. And within six months my son learned 500 new words. Within a year he was talking in sentences. I could see the little wheels turning in his head. But I also, as a mom, felt a freedom with language because now I could say anything and I didn't have to think about it. I also didn't have to repeat it.

Once I showed him how to pronounce something once, he could see it on the cue and I never had to show it to him again. And because the cue depends on the lips, he became an excellent lip reader. He did eventually learn to sign but he also learned Hebrew, the language of prayer in my religion, was able to have a bar mitzvah, was able to be fully included into our home. And I think that sense of isolation tends to come out sometimes when children don't feel that they have a full communication system in the home.

We're almost done. I have a two‑minute warning. I have a five‑minute warning. Ok.

So these are the vowel placements. We do have the full Cued Speech card up here if you didn't pick it up before. You're welcome to take that. What Cued Speech provides is specificity, pronouns, synonym, multiple meaning words, contractions, idioms. You can say anything, anything. You're not limited really at all. And you can manipulate the phonetics stream of English to develop awareness. Because you're cueing the phonemes of language, people are developing phonemic awareness. Parents with children with other learning disabilities can cue also. Because this provides visual and kinesthetic models of the language. It draws attention to the face and mouth for communication. And it demonstrates the difference between incorrect and correct pronunciation.

This is a great book as a resource for information about Cued Speech and also about research regarding Cued Speech.

Deaf cuers. Need of Deaf cuers really integrate really well with the hearing community and the Deaf community. They swing back and forth. They have no limitations on their education. We have kids who have come over from other countries and started to cue even as late as age 10 and have gotten Ph.D.s.

Really, our kids have been in every major college and we have a very, very high graduation rate among our kids, college graduation rate. Reading achievement of Deaf students who cue is at or above grade level. And this has been borne out by a number of studies. They can actually match the oral and total communication of children who have used other communication methods or significantly lower.

The National Cued Speech Association is your go‑to organization for information about cueing, for information about workshops. There is a new website called cuecollege.org which is offering online classes. We do have a handout here with workshops and cue camps. Cue camps are kind of weekend learning vacations that are very integrated, where you can meet native cuers and deaf adults and professionals who are in the field of Deaf Education who use Cued Speech all the time. It's kind of nice to bond with people and have interactions and conversations with people who are in the cueing community. That kind of retreat environment really promotes that kind of thing rather than an online class. But for people who are in secluded areas or whose schedules don't allow for cue college, the online course is a great option. And they also are going to be launching cue tutor where you can actually interact with an instructor.

And that's it. Do you have questions?

[Applause]

I would love to take questions. Thank you. Ma'am?

>> [Inaudible; off mic]

>> SARINA ROFFE: So she's from Oregon and she's asking where the pockets of Cued Speech are. So I would tell you that we do have people in Oregon and Seattle, in the Washington area, who we could hook you up with, NCSA could hook you up with. But, yes, there are regions where there are pockets, Northern Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina, Maine, Minnesota. Here in Chicago there's a good‑sized population of cuers. So, yeah, there are definitely places where it's more popular than other places. I know that in Minnesota they have a wonderful bilingual program in the Minneapolis area of using Cued Speech for American English and then using ASL. And ISD right here has a Cued Speech program. So definitely.

Other questions? Oh, come on. Nobody has questions? Sir?

>> Your son was going through education [Inaudible; off mic]

>> SARINA ROFFE: He used Cued Speech all through high school and actually into college. And then in college ‑‑ he had learned sign some time in middle school, a little bit. It's a gradual type of thing. And then when he was in college, he realized that for some subjects he preferred cueing. Because in a lot of subjects it's language‑based and you need the exact vocabulary and it's easier to get that exact vocabulary with cueing. But, like he says, watching a signer is like watching a show. So for social studies, he didn't need exact vocabulary. He liked to watch the show. It depended on the subject. Science, you need exact vocabulary.

You had a question?

>> [Inaudible; off mic]

>> SARINA ROFFE: I got fluent pretty quickly. I felt that I was in a desperate situation. First of all, I was 20 years old when I had my son. And he was born profoundly deaf. So you can imagine as a parent how you might feel. And my family was not around me. And after three years of the Early Intervention in what was supposed to be the best school system in the country, he wasn't doing so well. I felt pretty desperate. I had nothing to lose. And Dr. Cornett was alive at that time. And he said to me, “If you go home and you really do it, I'm telling you this will work for you.” And I thought he was a crackpot, honestly. I mean, I had killed myself with those 150 words. But it came easily. And once I memorized the vowels, everything else came easily. But I had to really work on the vowels. I would say within three to six months I was pretty fluent.

But, again, I pushed myself. Most people it takes a little longer. But you will leave a class knowing how to cue or how to figure out how to cue anything. Even what I tell parents when they leave my classes is use carrier phrases. So a carrier phrase is like it's time to, let's go to. You memorize that part and then you just have to figure out that last word. And that helps you get over the hump. And as long as you keep doing that ‑‑ and then you understand that the child is learning as you're learning. So you don't have to be fast. You don't have to be fluent at the beginning. You just have to have eye contact.

Last question.

>> You mentioned how your son learned later to sign. Was that a personal choice for him in his own Deaf Identity maturity? And you mentioned that deaf individuals go between both worlds easily. Can you talk about that?

>> SARINA ROFFE: Sure. It's easier in the Deaf world if you know some sign language. In the county that we lived in, in elementary school the children were separated by modality. So there was one elementary that was Cued Speech, there was one that they called at that time total communication, and there was one for oral kids. By middle school they put all the kids together in the same building. So even though they might have a Cued Speech ‑‑ a cued language transliterator for the cued kids, the kids were interacting in many social contexts within the building. So you had a lot of deaf kids in the building. They were all mainstreamed. But the cue kids were mainstreamed at a much higher rate. When I left Montgomery County, there were 32 kids that were cue kids in the county. 30 were fully mainstreamed with CLTs. Completely mainstreamed.

>> I'm sorry.

>> SARINA ROFFE: That's ok.

>> Gone over five minutes.

>> SARINA ROFFE: I'm available for questions. And again, there's plenty of materials up here. Feel free.