

Puccini's and Progress

Our son, Alex, has been attending BACA for 8 years now. He is non-verbal, but his communication continues to grow through the Proloquo2Go speech app (which he uses at "work") and signs (which he prefers at home). As his parents, we are always curious about how much he understands about what is going on around him. He frankly is not much of an instigator of communication, unless it involves pretzels. He's always willing to ask for pretzels!

While waiting to pick up Alex from BACA last Friday, my husband Chuck called me and we decided to meet for dinner at one of our favorite places, Puccini's. While my two guys were on the way, I ordered Alex's usual meal - an order of spaghetti and tomato sauce.

When Alex arrived at the restaurant, however, he scarfed down his cheesy garlic bread, and then he started using a sign I was unfamiliar with - pointer and middle finger together and extended, moving up and down. I said the phrase I've been instructed to use when his signs are a bit less than precise; "I don't know what that is, son. Maybe you should use your talker." Well, as usual when Alex is not at BACA, that idea landed like a lead balloon.

Alex's fingers then moved a bit more diagonally. I'm still not recognizing the sign. "Try again, honey." Finally the fingers ended up moving horizontally. Now that was beginning to look a bit more familiar!

There is a sign Alex knows that requires fingers to be in the shape of a peace sign pointing out, and making a "Z" shape - the sign for pizza. Now, we have rarely ever ordered pizza at Puccini's - the pastas are our favorite dishes there. Also, the restaurant was fairly empty, and no-one else had pizza on their table. But Alex obviously remembered that pizza was available there, and he had decided that was what he wanted to eat!

So instead of his usual spaghetti, Alex waited 8 minutes after his pasta was delivered for the restaurant to bring him a pizza - much to my consternation, he never touched the spaghetti. This is absolutely new territory for our son, insisting on one meal over another. I was irritated that he didn't want to eat a meal he'd eaten several times before, too - until it occurred to me that this was actually a step forward in his ability to communicate.

If we order or make something Alex doesn't want, he usually will barely eat or refuse the meal. When he is present while we order, we usually ask what he wants - options like chicken or shrimp or hamburger, and he will eat pizza when we order it and take it home. But this was absolutely the first time Alex asked for pizza while we were out AND the first time he brought up what food he'd prefer without being prompted!

Communication progress can feel slow sometimes - we have put Alex's verbal communication on the back burner for a while due to the lack of progress over months and months and months.

Realizing that non-verbal communication progress is being made in the moment can sometimes be challenging. However, being open to BACA's suggestions on how to respond to your child's attempts and accepting the communication you do get from your child - however you get it - can reap amazing rewards!