

Apps for Autism: Communicating on the iPad

Watch the Segment »

Autistic people whose condition prevents them from speaking are making breakthroughs with the help of tablet computers and special applications that allow them to communicate, some for the first time. Lesley Stahl reports.

Web Extras

[Apps for Autism](#)

[Autistic and passionate about Pavarotti](#)

[Temple Grandin's unique brain](#)

[More »](#)

(CBS News) For severely autistic people, communication is often impossible, leaving them unable to convey what they want or need. But as Lesley Stahl reports, touch-screen apps designed for tablet computers like the iPad are now giving autistic people new ways to express themselves, some for the first time. Teachers and parents are hailing the technology as a breakthrough, one that can reveal the true depth of knowledge and emotion trapped behind a wall of silence.

The following script is from "Apps for Autism" which aired on Oct. 23, 2011.

In the weeks since Steve Jobs died, there has been an outpouring of gratitude from his fans for the way his inventions, like the iPad, changed their lives.

Among the most passionate are parents of children with severe forms of autism, especially those who can't speak and appear hopelessly locked inside themselves. Those parents often say these kids understand more and know more than they're able to communicate.

["60 Minutes Overtime": Temple Grandin: Understanding autism](#)

Well now, with the iPad and other tablet computers spreading through the autism community, some of those parents are finding out they were right.

It turns out that autistic children show a real interest in the iPad with its easy touch-and-swipe screens. With specially-designed applications, or apps, these computers are helping them communicate and unlocking the

isolation of people like 27-year-old Joshua Hood.

Imagine spending your life having conversations like this...

Lesley Stahl: P, L...

...having to poke at words on a laminated piece of paper - one letter at a time.

Stahl: C. Plastic.

It was so frustrating for Josh, his mother Nancy says he would often give up and retreat into himself. At family gatherings, he was sidelined because no one understood him. At school, he sat passively in class unable to participate. When Josh was feeling bad or really needed something, the family resorted to charades.

Nancy: So, you'd be like-- you know, can you spell it? Can you show me? And so, he would--

Stahl: You'd act it out almost?

Nancy: He would. He would-- he would look around a room and see if he could find somethin' that sounded like it.

Stahl: Just to tell you one little thing?

Nancy: One thing that he wanted, yes.

[Waitress: How are you?]

But not anymore.

[Josh, using iPad: I want a drink.]

For the past year, Josh has been using an Apple iPad as his voice and he is - well, he's reborn!

[Waitress: What are we havin' to eat today, Josh?]

Josh: I want bagel bacon please.

Waitress: Ok.]

Now when he goes to the local diner, he can order his breakfast, himself. Josh's mom downloaded a special language app and added pictures, videos and symbols that allow him to convey his feelings.

...what he wants...

[Josh: Toys.]

And what he watches on TV!

[Josh: TV News, 60 Minutes.]

My first "60 Minutes" interview on an iPad! I asked about his brother Jimmy.

Stahl: And how old is Jimmy?

Josh: Keyboard. Numbers. Two, six. Jimmy 26.

Stahl: So he's one year younger than you are? Is he your best friend? Does that mean you love him? Yeah.

Josh is typical of people with autism in that he rarely looked directly at me; he rocks, and he has obsessions: in his case, it's World War II.

[Josh: Hogan's Heroes Season Six.]

His therapist Tammy Taylor will never forget the first time she put the iPad into his hands: what had been bottled up inside him began to pour out.

Tammy Taylor: It just blew me away that he could actually tell me his brother had a goatee and was bald.

Stahl: He's completely communicating.

Taylor: Absolutely. He's part of the community. I mean, communication is the essence of being human. And here he is, communicating fully now.

Stahl: Totally.

The language app that Josh uses is called "Proloquo2go."

[Josh: Josh's spaces. My place. Work.]

But there are other apps created specifically for autistic people: like "AutismXpress" to help children identify emotions.

And another called "Look in My Eyes" to practice eye contact.

Stahl: How do you feel about being on TV? Can you show me on there?

Josh: Categories. Feelings. Happy. Joshua happy.

Stahl: Tell me what's happening inside of you as your son starts to tell you what-- what he's been thinking. He's probably been trying to tell you for 27 years.

Nancy: Mind boggling, to tell you the truth. I always had said when he was younger, it was like, you know, he was a computer and I was computer illiterate. And I didn't know how to press the right keys-- sorry-- to-- to get him to communicate. It was just, you know, that-- that was the hard part, is you knew there was more in there, and you didn't know how to get it out.

Touch screen computers help Josh communicate. Can they do the same for these children at the Beverley School in Toronto, Canada - where half the students are severely autistic and more impaired than Josh?

Karen Sughrue is the producer.

To read more, go to CBS 60 Minutes by following the link below:

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-20124225/apps-for-autism/?tag=currentVideoInfo;videoMetaInfo