

# Presuming Competence in Educational Settings

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NOT BEING  
ABLE TO  
SPEAK  
IS NOT THE  
SAME AS  
NOT HAVING  
ANYTHING  
TO SAY

## Misconceptions that impact Presumption of Competence

We often misjudge students' behaviors as *isolation, lack of motivation, aggression, or non-compliance*, while these individuals are compensating and dealing with a body that *experiences sensory and motor differences, and cannot communicate effectively or impact the world around them.*



## **The least dangerous assumption is to...**

*presume competence*, and to provide opportunities consistent with high expectations, because to assume incompetence and not provide such opportunities could be more harmful, if your assumption were proved wrong.



“ There are two philosophies guiding much of autism theories and education. In one there is no presumption of competence. Rather, the nonspeaking individual is determined to be low-functioning intellectually and not properly processing human speech, thus requiring simplified lessons and constant drilling. This is the prevailing theory.

-Ido Kedar



“ In the other, there is a presumption of competence- that is, an intact mind may be buried behind a messed up motor system caused by neurological factors. Therefore, if the person is taught to move properly to point and spell words, that person may learn to express thoughts and potentially get a more normal education. Many, once thought to be hopeless cases, have proven that, like books, they shouldn't be judged entirely by their cover.

-Ido Kedar






**Presuming  
Competence**

**≠**

**Presuming  
Knowledge**



we have no idea what a child is  
capable of learning unless  
information is presented in a way  
that is accessible to them and  
they have a reliable way to  
communicate their understanding.

# Presumption of Competence

Questions to guide your approach:

- Does my child's team ever talk down, use a loud or slow voice, or talk about my child as if they are not there?
- Does my child's team use age-appropriate language, materials and topics that correlate to interests?
- Does my child's team understand that my child may not always show what they know or what they are thinking?

## **Accessible Academics**

*So.... my school / educational team definitely isn't presuming competence. And my kid's at home with me for the foreseeable future. Now what?*

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