

# How can a speech pathologist help you?

*Speech and language development is the basis on which almost all other skills develop. It refers to the different ways we communicate, including not only the way we talk but also the way we listen, gesture, read and write.*

What is communication?

Communication is the process of being able to understand and to be understood. This is something we very often take for granted.

There are 6 areas of communication:

## 1. Speech Development

At 3 years a large number of sounds are used but can be immature. It is expected that a child aged 2 years can be understood by an unfamiliar communicative partner 70% of the time.

Sounds expected between 0-3 years:

- lip sounds → /p/, /b/, /m/, /w/
- tongue tip sounds → /t/, /d/, /n/
- back of the tongue sounds → /k/ & /g/
- other sounds → /h/ & /y/

Errors that children make when they are beginning to talk include:

- saying an easier sound for a difficult one
- leaving out sounds
- leaving out pairs of words
- mixing up the order of sounds
- saying one sound instead of 2 or more

At 4 ½ years children should be using:

- Tongue tip sounds → /s/ & /z/
- Middle of the mouth sounds → /ch/ & /j/
- Other sounds → /l/ /j/, /v/ & /f/

By 5-6 years children can say all of their sounds correctly:

- The last sounds to develop include → /th/ and /r/

Strategies for working on Speech

- Enjoy sounds – as your child learns new sounds, imitate them
- Model the correct sounds – as cute as their production is it always best to model the accurate production and repeat the word for the child without having them to also repeat it.
- Nursery Rhymes are great for improving speech – not just through their subject matter, but also through their rhythm, rhyme, gesture inflection and sequencing. Rhythm and timing are essential for fluent, intelligible speech.
- Read books with words that contain a problem sound. Allow the child to simply listen to your correction production and after a while they might attempt the sound
- Play games with your lip and tongue
- Practise tongue acrobatics in front of a mirror.
- The characters in the book can help a child learn a sound. For example whenever the child sees that character, they make the sound that is related to that character (e.g. the snake says /sssss/ and the lion say /rrrr/).

## 2. Language development

At 3 your child can:

- Understand how objects are used (e.g. draw with crayon)
- Recognise their own needs such as hunger
- Follow directions
- Use 3-4 word sentences
- Begin to use basic grammar
- Enjoy telling stories and asking questions
- Have favourite books and TV programs
- Stay with one activity for 8-9 minutes
- Asks wh questions frequently

At 4 your child can:

- Understand shape and colour names
- Understand some time concept words
- Ask "who", "what", and " why" questions
- Use lots of words about 900, usually in 4-5 word sentences although may leave out the, a, is, an etc
- Begin to use complex sentences
- Use the correct grammar with the occasional mistakes
- Use language when playing with other children
- Speak clearly enough to be understood by most people
- Stay with an activity for 11-12 minutes
- Identify many colours and shapes

At 5 your child can:

- Understand opposites
- Use sentences of about 6 words with mostly correct grammar
- Talk about events which are happening, have happened or might happen.
- Explain why something happens
- Explain the function of objects
- Follow three step related simple commands
- Say how they feel and tell their ideas
- Become interested in writing, numbers and reading things

- Speak clear enough to be understood by everyone
- Count 10 objects
- Stay with one activity for 12-13 minutes
- Question for information

At 6 your child can:

- Use adult-like grammar in sentences and conversations
- Understanding the meaning of most words
- Name the days of the week in order and count to 30
- Predict the next sequence of events and tells a 4-5 part story
- Tell the month and day of their own birthday, name and address , left and right
- Correct articulation of speech sounds

Strategies for working on Language

- 1) Commenting – talk while you or your children are doing something, at or just above the level of your child. Simplify your language, so they can understand everything you say – short simple sentences. (e.g. while hanging out the washing, cleaning the house, cooking – provide the names and describe the objects).

Provide descriptions of what your child may be experiencing:

This technique does not require your child to talk because the aim is to feed the language into them. Quite often they will imitate some of what you are speaking about.

- 2) Expansion - Provide a slightly longer or more correct version of the child's sentence after they have spoken. This reinforces your child's message and also provides feedback or models the correct sentence without having to "correct"

them as such. You are now expanding your child's language to a more adult form. Be careful not to change your child's intended meaning.

- 3) Forced choice - This is a helpful technique for supplying new words and helping children to 'self correct'. Parents provide the children with all the words they need and the child then chooses the correct form. The child uses the correct sentence and repeats it. This choice can be as easy or as hard as you like. Be careful not to overuse this technique.
- 4) Books: enjoy books together. When reading books, pause and reflect on what you have read. Ask your child for their interpretation; how things would make them feel, what they think might happen next?
- 5) Vocabulary: talk about the similarities and difference between things, allow your child to cook using a child's cookbook with simple step by step instructions, define new words or concepts to your child, collect a number of objects to be placed in a mystery bag - one of you chooses the items and describes it for the other. They have a try to guess it and swap roles.
- 6) Pretend play/imaginary play: to practise in different environments. This helps in categorising and expanding knowledge of names of objects and actions.
- 7) Memory games with words or objects - (memory, snap, I went shopping and I bought a ....)
- 8) Concepts - hide pictures, toys, lollies around them room and have your child describe the hiding place as they find each one. Talk about under, over, top,

up, down, in off, beside. Trace family member's hands and talk about words such as: big, little, five, middle, first, last, long short etc. Match sock colours: find things around the house that are the same colour or associated to the item.

- 9) Listening and understanding: ask questions before reading a story to provide focus. Have your child follow a series of instructions in how to play with the play- dough, or play Chinese whispers.
- 10) Plan, Predict and Problem Solve: organise a family outing and involve your children in the planning → who is going, what will they see, how can they get there? While driving, discuss what would happen if we....forgot the picnic food, fell into the lake, and found a lost dog?

### 3. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is defined as "rules governing the use of language in context".

Pragmatics includes the following skills:

- Taking conversational turns,
- Attending to other and responds to conversation
- Appropriate person space
- Appropriate eye contact
- Ability to initiate, maintain and terminate a conversation
- Establishing a topic
- Providing sufficient information
- Language is relevant to the situation and context
- Language is appropriate to the situation and people present
- Language is sufficiently polite

#### Strategies for developing Pragmatics

- Provide good models of appropriate language use

- Provide a range of experiences for your child so they see how other communicate in that setting
- Play games where turn taking is an essential rule
- Provide feedback for your child if you haven't misunderstood them → be explicit

#### 4. Fluency

This is the area of communication that is best known as stuttering. Stuttering occurs when the flow of speech is interrupted by: sound repetitions (e.g. m-m-m-m mum), whole word repetitions (e.g. mum-mum-mum) or sound blocks or prolongations (e.g. mammy).

You can help your child during this time by:

- Don't be anxious about commenting to your child about their stuttering, but do it gently
- Use lower, steady speech to model for your child
- Give your child plenty of time to talk without interruption, especially if there are siblings
- Try not to be impatient or embarrassed by their speech
- Remember that hesitations and repetitions are perfectly natural in a child's early speech and may continue for some time.

#### 5. Voice

We can use our voice in many ways in order to convey a variety of meanings and for a variety of uses. It can be described in terms of:

- Volume: e.g. shouting, whispering
- Pitch: e.g. high or low
- Prosody: e.g. monotone, melodic

- Quality: e.g. harsh, nasal, raspy. Quality of a child's voice is important to monitor, especially if pain or voice loss is experienced.

#### Strategies

- discourage shouting, screaming, cheering, and excessive loud laughing, especially when sick
- encourage the use of a quiet "talking" voice
- avoid forceful coughing and throat clearing – if necessary, encourage children to do it gently
- encourage your child to drink lots of water – this keeps the vocal tract moist.

#### 6. Literacy or Phonological Awareness

Stage One (1 ½ -2 years)

- Distinguishes print from non-print
- Knows how to interact with books: right side up, turning pages from left to right
- Recognises some printed symbols.
- As they watch you run your finger under the text, they will realise that the words in the page have meaning

Stage Two (2 ½ - 5 or 6 years)

- Ascertains word boundaries in spoken sentences
- Ascertains word boundaries in printed sentences
- Engages in word substitution play
- Plays with the sounds of language
- Corrects own speech/language to help the listener understand the message
- Self-monitors own speech
- Able to separate words into syllables
- Inability to consider that one word could have different meanings.

Stage three (6-10 years)

- Begins to take the listener perspective
- Understands verbal humour involving linguistic ambiguity
- Able to understand that words can have 2 meanings
- Able to segment syllables into phonemes e.g. shape has 3 sounds = /sh/ + /ai/ + /p/

#### Stage four (10 years +)

- Able to extend language meaning into hypothetical realms e.g. to understand figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, parodies etc
- Able to manipulate various speech style to fit a variety of context and listeners

#### Strategies

- Share books with your child
- Choose books you both enjoy
- Early beginner books stress word recognition through repetition. Reading is not a matter of recognising words first and then getting the meaning, but rather the meaning guides and aids the recognition of words
- When reading books, point out the title of the book and use words like "author, pages, pictures, cover, front, back, beginning, middle and end".
- When reading, ask your child to retell the story back to you
- Leave out parts of a familiar story and get your child to fill it in
- Extend the types of questions you ask – be challenging
- Teach nursery rhymes
- Play with rhymes
- reading commonly seen labels or signs
- Teach your child not only the names of the letters of the alphabet, but also the sound each letter makes
- Have your child copying clapping patterns. This can be extended by

putting words and then syllables to the claps. Practise clapping the syllables of friends and family member's names.

- Make your own books about people you know by the child or your child's experiences
- Play "I spy with my little eye" with sounds
- Talk about long words and short words and long sounds and short sounds
- Link between Oral Language and Written Language  
Oral language skills are the basic "building blocks" for more formal skills such as reading and writing.

"We THINK in oral language and pictures in our minds. We READ and WRITE by building an extra level into thinking, talking and listening."

How will I know when my child has a communication problem?

You be best to seek advice from a speech pathologist if your child:

- Is not using single words by 18 months
- Is not putting words together by 2 ½ years
- Is not using 3-4 words phrase by 3- 3 ½ years
- Is using immature sentences
- Is hard to understand at 3 years
- Is not responding to sounds, words or instructions
- Does not seem to listen or understand
- Is using a nasal, loud, or hoarse voices
- Dysflency so repetitive when talking that communications difficult.
- Is struggling with literacy skills in the classroom.

By 5 years of age children should be talking almost as well as you. Certainly, their vocabulary will expand through life, but they

now know most of the rules of our language  
and can use it appropriately.

