

**A Guide To
Speech and Language Development
for
Kindergarten Students**



Your Child's Speech and Language Development

Parents often wonder how well their child's speech and language skills are developing. Their skills are extremely important to a child's future learning. Discovering any problems early gives a child a better chance to learn how to read, write and communicate successfully.

Speech-Language Pathologists generally work with:

- Articulation (speech sounds)
- Language (using correct grammar and vocabulary, as well as *understanding* what is said to them)
- Phonological Awareness (pre-reading skills that form the foundation for literacy)
- Fluency (stuttering)
- Voice

ARTICULATION

There is quite a wide range in age for when sounds are learned. By the time your child starts kindergarten they should be producing most sounds clearly **except** for the **V, SH, CH, J, R** and **TH** sounds, which are later-developing sounds. Children this age may also have a "frontal lisp" (e.g., "I thee a thun" for "I see a sun") – this is also normal at this age. An unfamiliar listener should be able to understand at least 90% of what your child says.

What Parents Can Do:

- Model correct production by saying the word back correctly to your child – don't make your child repeat after you when he/she makes a mistake.
- Pronounce your sounds and words clearly and correctly.
- Prior to entering kindergarten, contact the Fraser Valley Health Unit in Mission for a referral to the Speech-Language Pathologist (call (604) 814-5500).

LANGUAGE

By the time a child reaches kindergarten, he/she should be able to:

- Use 4 or more words in a sentence that sounds grammatical
- Follow directions of at least 2 steps (e.g., Go get your shoes and wait by the door.)
- Tell a simple story, keeping the events in order
- Ask and answer questions appropriately
- Place things into groups – for example, dogs, bears, rabbits are animals; apples, pears, bananas are fruit
- His/her vocabulary should be at least 2000 words by age 4, and contain a variety of word types (labels, action words, describing words)

What Parents Can Do:

- Limit the amount of 'screen time' that your child gets per day (tv, tablets, computers, video games).
- Talk to your child about everything. Children need a lot of verbal stimulation from infancy on.
- Use complete sentences when you talk to your child.
- Have meals together and talk about the day.
- Play games with words, like "I Spy," "20 Questions"
- Books are important – read to your child daily. Let them retell the story to you.
- Play or work with your child: play board games, play with toys, do outdoor activities, do chores together, and talk while you do these activities.
- Follow your child's lead – talk about what your child is doing, or what he/she is interested in.
- Listen to your child and expand on his/her language:

Child: "Truck broke!"

Parent: "The truck is broken. It needs a new wheel!"



PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness is the awareness of the sound structure of language. It involves the ability to generate rhyming words, count syllables, separate the beginning of the word from its ending and identify each of the phonemes (or speech sounds) in a word, e.g., c – a – t.

Skills in phonological awareness are an early predictor of success in reading and writing.

What Parents Can Do:

- Read nursery rhymes or sing songs with rhyming words
- Draw attention to the sounds in words
 - house, mouse – these words rhyme!
 - **big, bee** – these words start with **b**!
- While driving or walking, or at the dinner table, have your child say rhyming words of things that they see (e.g., tree – bee, book – hook, door – floor, mop – top)
- Clap the words in songs or nursery rhymes
- Clap syllables in names of family or friends (e.g., Man-dy, Jon-a-than, Je-ssi-ca)
- Delete a sound and have your child guess the word (e.g., “I see a __indow,”)
- Choose books with lots of rhyming. Point out the words that rhyme and have your child name another word that rhymes.



FLUENCY (STUTTERING)

Many children experience times when they are excited or upset. At these times it is difficult for the child to talk calmly and fluently. Normal stutter-like speech may occur. This is a normal part of developing speech and language. If the stuttering continues over a longer period of time (more than 3 months) or if the child expresses frustration or displays unusual facial or body movements along with the stuttering, then it might be a concern.

What Parents Can Do:

- Be a good listener. When your child is talking, give your undivided attention.
- Maintain a calm, relaxed manner when speaking or listening to your child.
- Speak more slowly and pause for one full second before responding to your child.
- Give your child enough time to speak. Do not rush, or make them feel, rushed.
- Avoid criticism or correction during his/her speaking, especially during normal moments of dysfluency.
- Let your child finish sentences without interruptions. Avoid filling in their words for them.

VOICE

A problem with a child's voice may be:

- hoarseness for more than two weeks
- voice pitch that is too high or too low
- a voice that is constantly too loud or too soft
- a voice that sounds too "nasal"

What Parents Can Do:

- Discourage your child from excessive shouting, screaming, cheering, loud singing, and making sound effects.
- Discourage your child from forced talking in noisy surroundings.
- Contact your family doctor for an evaluation by an ENT (Ear Nose and Throat doctor).



HEARING

In order for spoken language to develop at an age-appropriate rate, a child must be able to hear. Ear infections which are accompanied by reduced hearing can cause speech and language delays.

The following behaviours may indicate a hearing problem:

- Tugging at the ears
- Turning up the tv or radio
- Ignoring your call
- Poor concentration or limited attention
- Delayed speech and language development
- Frequent coughs, colds and/or allergies

Early detection of hearing difficulties may reduce or eliminate future problems.

If you have any questions about your child's speech and/or language development, please contact your child's school *Speech-Language Pathologist*.

Prior to entering school, contact the Mission Health Unit for an appointment with the *Speech-Language Pathologist* (604-814-5500).

Find a private Speech-Language Pathologist by contacting the BC Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (BCASLPA) at www.bcaslpa.ca or 1-877-222-7572.

