

Parent Power

At Therapy Focus we believe that parents are the experts when it comes to their child. We recognise that family is central to therapy and provide knowledge about the child's needs, strengths and goals.

Educating and empowering families is an important part of our holistic approach to service delivery. We strive to support children and families to reach their goals and live life to the fullest.

Our Parent Power brochures are a starting point for discussion about your child's goals and development. It offers tips, activities and strategies for a range of topics commonly faced by parents and carers.

PARENT POWER :

> Mobility

> Communication >

> Behaviour and Routine

> Augmentative and Alternative Communication

> Life at Home and in the Community

> Social Relationships

> Self-Care

> Play and Community

> Daily Learning

> Transitions



> Communication

Communication is the way we exchange our thoughts, feelings, opinions and information through talking, writing, signs, gestures and facial expression. Communication is typically broken down into speech and language. Speech (or articulation) refers to the sounds we make when we talk.

Language is much broader and refers to the entire system of giving (expressing) and receiving (comprehending) information that is meaningful. The way we give and receive information includes what we say, what we understand and how we communicate with our body language, gesture and facial expressions too.

Although problems in speech, and the understanding and expression of language differ, they often overlap; if the child does not understand the meaning of a word, they will be less likely to use it. If the child is not able to produce speech, there is an impact on their language development. Poor language development will make developing literacy skills more difficult.

Consider the following:

- Is your child's speech not understood well by you or most other people?
- Does your child have difficulty following instructions at home or at school?
- Is your child able to identify the different sounds in words when reading?
- Does your child have difficulty finding the right word to express his thoughts?
- Is your child unable to put words together to tell a story or tell news at school?
- Can your child follow conversations with his peers?

STRATEGIES TO ASSIST LANGUAGE SKILLS

Use every opportunity during your daily routine to talk about what you are doing, as well as what you are thinking and feeling. Talk about your child's actions and those of other people when your child is engaged in an activity such as playing, riding in the car, watching a movie or eating a meal. This helps your child learn to connect what they see, hear, do and feel with the words to describe them. Remember to point to the things you are talking about to make it clear which words go with what they are seeing.

It is a good idea to get into the habit of using everyday opportunities for enriching language. For example, when you go shopping, talk to your child about what the food is called, which are fruit and which are vegetables. Talk about where food comes from and how heavy or light the box is. Talk about the colour and size of the things you put in your shopping cart. Let your child guess what is on the shopping list from your description, for example "we are looking for a yellow fruit."

Keeping your child engaged in the shopping will make the experience more fun for all.

Model the right words when your child speaks or points to an object. Repeat words that your child is not saying clearly, for example "oh you mean the dog?" if your child says 'gog', and use a range of descriptive

words such as big, huge, large etc. Children need to hear words to learn them. If we keep our vocabulary too limited, their vocabulary will be limited too. Use books to show pictures when explaining or introducing things that your child may not see in their daily life.

Talk at a speed that your child can understand. You may need to talk slightly slower than you normally do, or you may need to pause between the things you say so that your child can understand better. Stress the words you are teaching by saying them slightly louder, longer or in a stronger voice. It can help to slow your speech down if you are thinking through what you want to say.

Expand on what your child is showing you or talking about.

If your child shows you a dog, talk about what a dog sounds like or eats. If they are commenting on things they are looking at, comment on what you notice and ask a few questions to get them thinking about other things. Answer your own questions in a thoughtful way if your child doesn't know the answer. This way you expand and model a conversation.

Praise your child and let them know they are doing a great job. This will keep them engaged and motivated to talk to you.

Be patient and calm, and aim to keep talking together as natural as possible. Not all conversations are big or long. Relax into chatting with your child.

RESOURCES TO ASSIST COMMUNICATION

It can be very useful to use some visual information to help children with language difficulties. Some children find it difficult to understand information that they can only hear. Providing pictures or other visual supports can be very helpful in supporting more understanding of language. These supports are usually referred to as 'visuals'.

Chat books or remnant books

Children with communication needs often spend a lot of time learning how to ask for their basic needs, but they miss out on the social closeness of having a chat with their peers. Chat books can be used to help your child have a conversation with others. A chat book consists of pages or plastic sleeves filled with anything that is important to the child, such as tactile remnants, (i.e. locks of hair from haircut, balloon scrap from parade, or a shell from the beach), pictures/print items (movie ticket stubs, part of menu, napkins with logos), textures, and scents. Your child can use these to choose topics for communication. As there are clues and prompts for the other person talking, your child

experiences a shared conversation around the bits and pieces in the chat book. Remnant or chat books can be fun to make together and are a good way for children with communication difficulties to tell news, start a conversation with others, or share their favourite things with others. You don't need any special skills to put a chat book together.



Visual charts

These charts are a way of showing your child what is expected from them, and how well they are doing in a behaviour, an activity or a specific goal you are trying to teach them. Many children need to be encouraged to do simple daily things, visual charts can help your child to remember what they

need to do and to check that it is done. These charts can be a shared conversation piece and can help children who have difficulty understanding instructions to follow what is required of them. They can also be used to plan out news for verbal children who have difficulty explaining themselves, or remembering the order that things happened in. Visual charts can be hand drawn with the child, or pre-printed. They don't have to be fancy to be very effective. You and your child can make one together. There are lots of ideas and templates free to use on the internet.

Visual charts can also be used to help your child to understand themselves. A simple chart or visual board of different emotions can help you to chat with your child about how they are feeling. It can help your child to learn about emotion words and to tell you how he is feeling.

Aided language simulations boards

These boards that are topic specific grids of pictures that support the model of sentences and interaction in a specific topic or game. The child can see the adult point out >

SALLY'S STORY

Sally is a 10 year-old girl with an intellectual disability. Sally's parents are concerned that she does not follow instructions and uses only basic three word sentences to communicate with her family and peers. Her parents would like to see Sally become more independent in responding to instructions and also increase the length of her sentences.

Memory games and visualisation strategies were used at home and school to support Sally's ability to follow instructions and directions. Her peers would complete instructions which included words like "beneath, beside, secondly". Sally followed

their lead until she understood what the words meant. Various visual supports were used to encourage Sally to extend her sentences, for example, a symbol of a train with several carriages representing words in a sentence. Sally's family, teachers and peers also used ways to prompt Sally to add more words and create longer sentences.

After two school terms of support and practice, Sally was able to follow complex instructions with minimal support, and continually worked towards fulfilling her goals.

- how they make the sentence as the adult points to the pictures on the board. This gives the child a visual model of language at the same time as they hear it.



For example, in this simple tea party board, it is possible to say lots of things, like: “Do you want tea?”, “Your turn?”, “Do you want your cookie?”, “Your turn, you pour the tea”, and so on.

It is a good idea to be sure that your communication boards, or aided language stimulation boards have words on them that allow the child to say what they want, what they like, what is happening in the activity and to be able to comment about what they don't like or don't want to do. The board should also contain enough vocabulary for you to model good language to your child.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC): a means of communication to support or replace speech. AAC tools may be low tech, such as pictures, signing and alphabet boards; or high tech, such as computers or electronic communication aids.

Articulation: movement of the articulators (mouth, throat, tongue and teeth) together to shape sounds, which as a result produces speech and words

Articulation disorder: difficulty in pronouncing particular speech sounds (consonants or vowels).

Developmental Language delay: A child's language is slow in development and is similar to that of a younger child.

Developmental Language Disorder: A child's language is not following the usual order for language development.

Dysfluency/non fluency/stuttering: A disorder which affects the fluency of speech production. Stuttering speech is characterised by 'involuntary interruptions' (usually repetition of sounds or words or part of words), 'prolongations' (where the person extends a sound) and 'blocks' (where the person is unable to produce a particular sounds and seems to be 'stuck' on a sound.)

Dyspraxia/apraxia (verbal): a coordination difficulty. The brain transmits the wrong message about when and how the muscles of the throat and mouth should move to make voice and speech. Speech may sound muddled because the wrong sounds are produced in the wrong places. Sometimes words are said automatically and sound clear. Other forms of dyspraxia can affect other parts of the body too.

Echolalia: Repetition of words/phrases overheard. A good example would be repetition when watching television shows or listening to the radio.

Expressive Language Difficulty: difficulty affecting the child's ability to speak, write or gesture.

Hearing Impairment: A hearing loss that can be either temporary or permanent and can range in severity from mild to profound.

Non-Verbal Communication: Communication which is not spoken or written. Non-verbal communication includes facial expression, body language, natural gestures, tone of voice, drawing and use of symbols.

Receptive Language Difficulty: Difficulty affecting the person's ability to understand other people or to read, may be developmental or acquired.

Semantic disorder: Difficulty understanding and using the meaning of words, may be developmental or acquired.

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