

Communication strategies with your child: Tips from a speech therapist

Role of a speech therapist

- ◆ Speech therapists are professionals who are trained to assess, manage, and provide treatment for communication, feeding and/or swallowing difficulties.

Communication

- ◆ Communication typically involves both speech and language skills.



SPEECH

- Related to how we say, or articulate, sounds in words and/or sentences
- Involve coordinating the muscles of our lips, tongue, and jaw

LANGUAGE

- Related to the way we communicate with others
- Involves:
 - 1) Receptive language**
– listening/understanding, reading
 - 2) Expressive language**
– speaking, writing

These skills help a child to express their wants and needs effectively and clearly.



Speech and language development takes place most rapidly during a child's early years and continues into school age. These skills are essential to facilitate a child's learning and acquisition of other skills such as reading and writing.

COMMUNICATION AND CANCER

Children diagnosed with or are undergoing treatment for cancer may experience speech and/or language problems of varying severity. There may be a:

- Delay in the acquisition of skills or
- Loss of skills that they have previously

These can affect a child's ability to talk, understand and use words, read and/or write to communicate their wants and needs effectively and clearly. The difficulties may persist beyond the diagnosis and treatment, and further affect their cognition and learning ability.



GENERAL STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

Supporting communication development



Children learn to communicate through exposure to speech and language they hear around them. For children who experience a delay in developing their speech and language skills, here are some ways to support them in developing skills:



1 **Make use of *experiences and/or items* that your child may enjoy in your routines or everyday experiences:**

Play with toys or craft together.
Use them to teach and practice different concepts or ideas

e.g. Put the block on the table,
I want the small star.



Look through videos or photographs.
Talk about what is happening in them.



Go out for walks and label the items on your walk.



Sing songs or rhymes.



Play simple games
e.g. I spy, Simon says, Charades

Share a book or cartoon with your child.
Choose a book or cartoon that's easy for your child to follow.



2 **Model what and how to use language.**

Use *key words* or *simple sentences* to describe what is happening.

3 **Recast words by repeating them with more details or in the correct manner**

e.g. The child says "juice". You can say "I want more juice" or "I want apple juice"

4 **Avoid yes/ no questions. Instead, ask questions that encourage them to:**

◆ Make a choice

e.g. Do you want rice or noodles for dinner?, Do you want the blue or red socks?

◆ Think and provide more information

e.g. What do you think we should do next?, Where can we find it?, Why do they go together?

Supporting communication difficulties

Some children may be able to communicate but have troubles finding the right words to use. This can easily frustrate or upset them. Here are some tips to support their communication:

◆ **Give your child time to express their thoughts.**

Avoiding rushing to finish their sentences because this can make them more upset.

◆ **Provide praise and encouragement for all communication attempts.**

◆ **Use visuals or gestures to support what you want to communicate.**

↳ e.g. thumbs up/down, pointing to the items in a picture
↳ e.g. objects, pictures, spelling of the word



◆ **Provide clues to help them find the word.**

These clues may be related to the category of the word, the function of the word (e.g. It is used to..) or the spelling or sound of the word (e.g. It starts with the letter.., It rhymes with...)



◆ **Model for your child what and how to say it.**

Get them to repeat it back after you.

◆ **Highlight key words and break down long sentences.**

You may talk to your medical team if you are concerned about your child's speech or language. They may recommend a referral to the speech therapist who can help to assess and manage the speech or language difficulties. The therapist may use a range of assessment and treatment approaches, and can recommend strategies to address specific concerns.

