



# Speech and Language Package for Health Professionals

**Talking Matters**

Speech Pathology

*Helping your children reach their potential*

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)

**Ph 8255 7137**



# Index

	Page number
<b>An information pack for health professionals</b>	4
<b>Don't wait to help children with communication needs!</b>	5
<b>The importance of a having a hearing assessment</b>	6
<b>What happens in a speech and language assessment</b>	7
<b>What to expect by age</b>	8
What to expect at 12 months of age	9
What to expect at 18 months of age	10
What to expect at 2 years of age	11
What to expect at 2 1/2 years of age	12
What to expect at 3 years of age	13
What to expect at 3 1/2 years of age	14
What to expect at 4 years of age	15
What to expect at 4 1/2 years of age	16
What to expect at 5 years of age	17
<b>Checklists and referral sheets</b>	18
Which children should be referred for speech pathology?	19
Referral form for paediatric speech pathology services	20
Referral checklist 12 month olds	21
Referral checklist 18 month olds	22
Referral checklist 2 year olds	23
Referral checklist 2 1/2 year olds	24
Referral checklist 3 year olds	25
Referral checklist 3 1/2 year olds	26
Referral checklist 4 year olds	27
Referral checklist 4 1/2 year olds	28
Referral checklist 5 year olds	29
Referral checklist 6 year olds	30
Referral checklist students over the age of 6	31
<b>Information for parents by age</b>	32
Communication tips for 18 month olds	33
Communication tips for 2 year olds	34
Communication tips for 2 year olds (cont.)	35
Communication tips for 2 1/2 year olds	36
Communication tips for 2 1/2 year olds (cont.)	37
Communication tips for 3 year olds	38

# Index (cont.)

## Page number

### Information for parents by age (cont.)

Communication tips for 3 year olds (cont.)	39
Communication tips for 3 1/2 year olds	40
Communication tips for 3 1/2 year olds (cont.)	41
Communication tips for 4 year olds	42
Communication tips for 4 1/2 year olds (cont.)	43
Communication tips for 5 year olds	44
Communication tips for 5 year olds (cont.)	45

### Developmental Issues

What is autism?	47
What is autism? (cont.)	48
What is Asperger's Syndrome?	49
What is Asperger's Syndrome? (cont.)	50
What is a speech sound difficulty?	51
What is a language delay or disorder?	52
What is stuttering?	53
Can speech pathologists help with feeding?	54
What is dyslexia?	55

### Information on support options

FaHCSIA's Helping Children with Autism package.	57
FaHCSIA's Better Start funding package.	58
Medicare rebates for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder	59
Medicare rebates for children through the Better Start program	60
Chronic Disease Allied Health Services	61
Healthy Kids Check for 4 year olds	62

### What can parents do to help?

Learning to listen	64
Learning to listen (cont.)	65
Top 10 tips for talking with babies and toddlers	66
Top 10 tips for talking with babies and toddlers (cont.)	67
Top 10 things to do to help a child's speech	68
Top 10 things to do to help a child's speech (cont.)	69
Top 10 things to develop your child's literacy	70
Top 10 things to develop your child's literacy (cont.)	71

### About Talking Matters

72

# An information pack for health professionals

Talking Matters is a speech pathology practice in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. We have a team of nine speech pathologists working from schools, preschools and our offices in Elizabeth East. We also have a speech pathologist currently working one day a week from a room in the Kapunda Hospital servicing clients in the Barossa Valley.

We have put this package together in the hope to build a useful resource that will serve to further develop the relationship between our practice and the medical professionals we work with in the area. Our goal is to provide medical professionals who have initial contact with families with easy to use information sheets to assist them in determining if a referral to a speech pathologist is required.

With this goal in mind we have included in this manual:

- Information on the relationship between hearing and speech.
- An overview of communicative milestones by 6 monthly age increments to guide your discussion with families.
- Checklists, again in 6 monthly age increments to use when determining if a child should be referred to a speech and language pathologist.
- A referral template, however we would be happy for referrals to be made in the manner most convenient to individual practitioners.
- A series of handouts to provide families with information about things they can do to support children at risk at home. Again these are organised in 6 monthly age increments.
- Some general 'What is?' handouts to provide information to families who need further information presented in a family friendly format.
- General information about a range of funding options available to eligible families to subsidise private speech pathology fees. Many families pay for therapy themselves because they understand the vital role communication plays in a child's overall and long term development.

We work with a large range of children aged from 18 months to 18 years. We can assist children with speech, language, fluency (stuttering), autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Down's Syndrome, global developmental delays, behavioural issues, learning and literacy issues and more.

Working with us is easy. Clients simply ring and make an appointment and our friendly reception team will help them through the process and provide any additional

information. For further information you can also call Carla on (08) 8255 7137 for a confidential discussion.



Clients are able to make an appointment by phoning our office on 8255 7137. Our website also holds a wealth of information.



# Don't wait to help children with communication needs!

*When children are delayed in their speech, language or learning or if parents are concerned about communication or social development, a 'wait and see' approach is often taken. While this aims to avoid parents being unnecessarily concerned, it can result in a child missing out on vital early intervention.*



A child developing 25% slower than his peers at 2 years of age will be six months behind and need to make 18 months progress in the next 12 months to "catch up". Without assistance if this child continues to develop at this slower rate by four years he will be 12 months behind and need to make 24 months progress in the next 12 months in order to catch up to his peers and be ready for school. As children make rapid advances in speech, language and learning between three and five years this will be difficult and it is likely that the child will begin school at risk of developing difficulties with reading, writing, spelling and learning. By contrast **early support can help a child develop the necessary skills to lay the foundations for future learning** and parents can learn how to best support development at home.

While public services can offer this support to families there is often a lengthy waiting period which contributes to the delay in accessing vital early support and better long term outcomes.

At Talking Matters we can offer **immediate bookings** for assessments and follow up therapy and have a **range of options to make private therapy affordable** for families including:

- Private health fund rebates
- Medicare rebates under an Enhanced Primary Care Plan
- Federal government funding through the 'Helping Children with Autism' package for children under seven years with autism, Asperger's Syndrome and PDD-NOS
- Federal government funding through the 'Better Start' package for children under seven years with hearing loss, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, and Fragile X Syndrome
- Medicare rebates through the 'Helping Children with Autism' package for children over seven years with autism, Asperger's Syndrome and PDD-NOS
- Medicare rebates through the 'Better Start' package for children over seven years with hearing loss, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, and Fragile X Syndrome

**Our team of nine speech pathologists** have a range of areas of expertise to cater for children from 18 months to 18 years with a range of communication, social and learning needs. Our bright, spacious, child friendly offices are located in Elizabeth East and we also provide a visiting service to local schools.

To find out more about what Talking Matters can offer your clients visit [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)



# The importance of having a hearing assessment

*Too many children with hearing loss aren't receiving adequate help and are at risk for social, emotional, behavioural, and learning difficulties, according to the Better Hearing Institute (BHI) in a recent study.*

A large part of the problem is that children's hearing problems are often undetected. Hearing loss increases the risk of children developing other problems including difficulties with:

- Speech and language development
- Relationships with peers
- Self-esteem and social skills
- Relationships with family
- Grades in school

We strongly recommend that all children who are delayed in their communication or development have a hearing test completed by an audiologist. We hope that when a child has their hearing tested that they will come back with a clean bill of health, but if there is a problem we need to know so we can help. Below are some options for families living in the northern suburbs of Adelaide that we are currently aware of for having a child's hearing tested.

Hearing assessments are provided at the Child and Youth Hearing Assessment Centre. Phone 8303 1530 (County Callers phone 1300 364 100) for an appointment. There is no charge for this service but waiting times are likely to apply.

Alternatively there is also an audiologist at the Modbury hospital. To make an appointment, phone the hospital on 8161 2130. Please check with the service to see if they need a referral from your GP or your speech pathologist

Ron Kendall is an audiologist who provides private hearing assessments for children over four years of age. He sees children in Gawler, Salisbury, Clare, Kapunda, Modbury and Tanunda. For further information and a booking, phone 8563 2149. Please confirm costs when booking.

If a child has had recurring ear infections **a referral to an ear nose and throat specialist for review is recommended.** Repeated treatment with antibiotics may treat the infection but often leaves residual fluid behind the ear drums which reduces the clarity of the child's hearing. Reduced hearing during these important times of child development can put children at a **serious disadvantage developmentally.**

\*Not all audiologists are able to complete hearing tests on young children so be sure to advise of your child's age when booking.





# What happens in a speech and language assessment?

*A language assessment may be recommended if your child is having difficulties communicating, shows skills below the level expected for their age or is having difficulties with learning. Language skills may also be assessed if there are things in your child's development or history which increase the chances of language difficulties such as hearing problems, prematurity, developmental delay or some disabilities.*

**Assessment** usually begins with gathering information from the parent about their concerns as well as information about the child's medical and developmental history. Information from school is also useful and often the child's teacher is asked to complete a questionnaire about the child's abilities. Reports from any previous assessments that the child has had are also considered.

**A number of activities** are used to assess the child's communication skills. This may involve use of formal tests or less formal play and book based activities or a combination of both depending on the child's age and abilities. The speech pathologist will first watch your child and take into account information from the parent to choose the most useful assessment activities for each child. Parents are encouraged to be in the room for the assessment in most cases.

**A language assessment covers a range of skills areas.** Language skills are divided into two broad areas: **receptive** and **expressive** language. **Receptive language** refers to the child's ability to understand the language that others use. This includes understanding words and sentences in order to learn new things, follow instructions and understand questions. **Expressive language** refers to the child's ability to use words or other means to express needs, wants, opinions and ideas to others.

**A speech assessment** is completed if there are concerns about the way a child uses their speech sounds. It usually involves naming some pictures and talking about other pictures or things they have done so the speech pathologist can listen to their speech sounds.

## **Assessment may include:**

- the way the child uses sounds to form spoken words,
- the way words are put together to form sentences,
- use of grammar,
- forming longer pieces of language such as stories,
- the use of language, such as in holding a conversation and solving problems,
- written language skills including forming written words, sentences and stories,
- the meaning aspects of language such as understanding words and concepts,
- phonological awareness such as understanding sounds, syllables and rhyme, hearing sounds, using letters, breaking down words into separate sounds and blending sounds together to form words.



**This information** allows the speech pathologist to better understand the child's strengths and weaknesses. At the end of the assessment the results are discussed with the parents. The parents and other relevant people are then provided with a written summary of the assessment outcomes as well as activities and strategies to assist the child as appropriate. Support options are also discussed with parents so they understand how they can help.

# What to expect by age





# What to expect at 12 months of age

One year olds are developing communicators that are able to convey their wants and desires using gesture, pointing and through their facial expression. They will look at caregivers and items they want and enjoy games like 'boo', anticipating their next turn. They also like to copy actions they see on a day to day basis like 'brush your hair'. They will turn their head to look at new or interesting sounds and will look at someone who says their name. They are beginning to experiment with sounds and will attempt to sing songs and rhymes, although they will use sounds rather than clear words.

## **By one year of age children can understand:**

- to give a toy when asked
- their name and turn to look when it is called
- some body parts and can show you 1 or 2 body parts on themselves
- simple instructions with 1 information carrying word without parent pointing (e.g. get your shoe)
- point to familiar pictures of people, clothing etc. (e.g. be able to find 'Nanna' in a photo)



## **By one year of age children communicate by:**

- pointing, eye gaze and making sounds to ask for things
- babbling (e.g. using words like bababa, mamama, tata)
- using a small range of sounds (e.g. p, b, m, t, d, n, w) and vowel sounds
- starting to use their first words at approximately 12 months old.
- using 10-20 words when aged 12-15 months
- using changes in pitch to show they are asking a question
- attempting to copy a parent to say a familiar word
- making animal and transport noise (e.g. moo, woof, woof, brmmmmm)

Children who are not attempting to use pointing, eye gaze and sounds by 12 months of age are at an increased risk of developing long term speech and language difficulties. **If you are concerned** that your child cannot do some of these things an assessment with a qualified speech pathologist can help by:

- Telling you where your child's development is compared with other children of the same age.
- Suggesting some strategies and activities to help your child develop skills they need to learn.
- Letting you know if your child may benefit from speech/language therapy.
- Advising you if there is anything else that should be checked such as hearing or general development.

**There is more information on the Talking Matters website about child's communication skills.**

# What to expect at 18 months of age

*Eighteen month olds are becoming active and sociable. They are learning to use and understand words but still rely on gestures and tone to make their meaning clear. They are copying lots of things from adults, both words and actions and so are like little sponges, ready to learn and absorb new information.*

## **By 18 months of age children can :**

- follow simple instructions such as “find your shoes”
- point to familiar pictures in a book
- point to simple body parts
- respond to their name
- make eye contact when spoken to and point to make their meaning understood
- understand ‘stop’ and ‘no’

## **By 18 months of age children communicate by:**

- using 10 to 20 simple words or phrases
- waving or saying ‘hello’ or ‘bye’
- trying to copy new words
- pointing to things they want but can’t say yet
- asking “what’s that?” with words or by pointing
- responding with words or babble when spoken to
- using tone of voice with gestures to make their meaning understood



Children who are not using 10 words, or gesture and babble to communicate by 18 months of age are at an increased risk of developing long term speech and language difficulties, but early help can make all the difference. **If you are concerned** that your child cannot do some of these things an assessment with a qualified speech pathologist can help by:

- Telling you where your child’s development is compared with other children of the same age.
- Suggesting some strategies and activities to help your child develop skills they need to learn.
- Letting you know if your child may benefit from speech/language therapy.
- Advising you if there is anything else that should be checked such as hearing or general development.

**There is more information on the Talking Matters website at [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) about how to develop your child’s communication skills.**

# What to expect at 2 years of age

*Two year olds are active and sociable and 'into everything'. From around two years children go through a period of rapid growth in their communication skills, developing from a toddler experimenting with combining words to a three year old who can use sentences and hold simple conversations.*

Two year olds should be using at least 50 single words and putting short phrases of two or three words together. Their words should include the names of people and objects, action words, describing words such as 'big' and 'hot' as well as functional words such as 'gone, more, mine, up' and the two year old's favourite word 'no'. Their speech should include a range of different speech sounds including the early developing sounds: p, b, m, n, t, d, h, w and y though they may not use them correctly in all words. Not everything they say may be clear and they may still use some babble when trying to express themselves but familiar people should understand much of what they say.

## **By two years of age children can understand:**

- what things are used for e.g. "what goes on your feet?"
- simple concepts such as 'big/little', 'hot/cold', 'in/out'
- the difference between 'he' and 'she'
- how to follow simple instructions "find your shoes"

## **By two years of age children can say:**

- many single words and two word combinations
- some describing words 'big', 'hot'
- ask some simple questions "what's that?" "where's Dad?" use words for possession 'mine, my teddy, daddy's shoe'
- use plurals 'two dogs'
- answer 'yes/no', 'what' and 'where' questions.



Children with **less than 50 words or who are not combining words together by two years** are at an increased risk of developing long term speech and language difficulties. **If you are concerned** that your child cannot do some of these things an assessment with a qualified speech pathologist can help by:

- Telling you where your child's development is compared with other children of the same age.
- Suggesting some strategies and activities to help your child develop skills they need to learn.
- Letting you know if your child may benefit from speech/language therapy.
- Advising you if there is anything else that should be checked such as hearing or general development.

# What to expect at 2 1/2 years of age

*Two and a half year olds are learning to use words and phrases to express their developing independence. At times they may still rely on gestures and tone to add to their meaning and their pronunciation is still developing. They are copying lots of things from adults but are also able to combine words in new ways to say things they have not heard before.*

Two and a half year olds should be using hundreds of words and should be combining words into simple phrases of two to four words. They should be beginning to use a few simple grammar structures such as 'the', 'a', 'is' and '-ing'. They can follow simple instructions with a few key words and answer simple questions. Their speech should include a range of different speech sounds though they will still make many errors in the way that they say things. People who are familiar to the child should understand much of what they say.

## **By two and a half years of age children can understand:**

- More than 300 words
- Follow simple instructions such as "put your shoes in your bag"
- Point to objects by function such as "what do we eat with"
- Point to most body parts
- Understand 'what' and 'where' questions
- Make eye contact when spoken to and respond to questions



## **By two and a half years of age children can say:**

- More than 100 words
- Use many names of objects as well as action words (eat, sit, run) and describing words (hot, big)
- Use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things and make comments
- Combine two and three words together "my shoes" "want more drink"
- Use simple grammar words such as 'the', 'a', 'is', 'on', 'in'

Children with **less than 100 words or who are not consistently combining words together** are at an increased risk of developing long term speech and language difficulties, but early help can make all the difference. **If you are concerned** that your child cannot do some of these things an assessment with a qualified speech pathologist can help by:

- Telling you where your child's development is compared with other children of the same age.
- Suggesting some strategies and activities to help your child develop skills they need to learn.
- Advising you if there is anything else that should be checked such as hearing or development.

# What to expect at 3 years of age

Three year olds are going through a period of rapid development in their communication skills. They move from combining words together to using “real” sentences. Their speech becomes clearer too, so that unfamiliar people, not just Mum and Dad, can understand them.

## Three year olds should be able to understand the following:

- Names of most common objects and actions.
- Instructions with a couple of parts, such as “get your shoes and put them by the door”.
- Concepts and describing words such as position words: in, on, off, out, up, down, under, on, top; size concepts such as: big, little, small, long; number concepts such as: one, two, more; and describing words such as loud, quiet, heavy, soft, hard, fast, slow.
- Function words: “find me something to cut with”, “show me which one can fly”.
- What and where questions “What is this?” “Where is the duck?” .
- Negatives: ‘no’, ‘not’, ‘don’t’.

## Three year olds should be able to do the following:

- Name most common objects and actions.
- Make sentences of up to five words.
- Use early grammar words such as: he, she, is, a, the, and word endings: John’s, cats, running.
- Answer ‘yes/no’ and ‘what/where’ questions.
- Tell their name, age and if they are a boy or girl.
- Use a range of speech sounds in the beginning, middle and ends of words and speak clearly so that most of what they say can be understood by an unfamiliar person.



**If you are concerned** that your child cannot do some of these things an assessment with a qualified speech pathologist can help by:

- Telling you where your child’s development is compared with other children of the same age.
- Suggesting some strategies and activities to help your child develop skills they need to learn.
- Letting you know if your child may benefit from speech/language therapy.
- Advising you if there is anything else that should be checked such as hearing or general development.

**There is more information on the Talking Matters website at [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) about how to develop your child’s communication skills.**



# What to expect at 3 1/2 years of age

*Three and a half year olds are becoming confident communicators. They are speaking in sentences and unfamiliar listeners can understand most of what they say. Their speech should be able to be understood most of the time, though they will still make some errors with sounds.*

## **Three and a half year olds should be able to:**

- Understand the names of most common items.
- Follow instructions with 3 key words in it e.g. “put your shoes and hat in your bag”.
- Answer ‘who?’, ‘what?’ and ‘where?’ questions.

## **Three and a half year olds should be able to :**

- Name most common objects.
- Use many action words (eat, sit), describing words (hot, red) and position words (in, on, under).
- Use sentences comprising four to six words.
- Use grammar words including pronouns (he, she, I, you), articles (a, the) and verb tenses (is eating, jumped).
- Use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things, make comments and ask questions.
- Link sentences together in simple sequences with ‘and’ and ‘then’ e.g. “I went to the zoo and saw a tiger.”
- Tell their name, age and if they are a boy or a girl.

**If you are concerned** that your child cannot do some of these things an assessment with a qualified speech pathologist can help by:

- Telling you where your child’s development is compared with other children of the same age.
- Suggesting some strategies and activities to help your child develop skills they need to learn.
- Help you organise any assistance your child needs to get back on track.

**There is more information on the Talking Matters website at [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) about how to develop your child’s communication skills.**





# What to expect at 4 years of age

*Four year olds are confident communicators. They are able to speak clearly and fluently in long and complex sentences.*



## **Four year olds should be able to:**

- Understand and use a wide variety of words.
- Construct complex sentences using joining words (conjunctions) such as: 'and', 'then', 'so', 'but', 'because' 'when', 'although'.
- Use most grammatical markers correctly including pronouns: he, she, his, hers, him, her, I and verb tenses: jumped, will jump, is jumping. Four year olds may still have difficulty with some irregular plurals such as 'mice' and irregular verbs such as 'fell' but they should use most adult grammar.
- Be able to hold a conversation, listening and responding to what the other person says for a number of turns.
- Be able to use language to join in groups and play cooperatively with other children.
- Be able to describe something they have done at another time or place.
- Be able to retell a familiar story from a book.
- Be able to tell how to do something familiar with a number of steps such as making a sandwich or brushing your teeth.
- Follow instructions with a number of steps.
- Ask and answer 'who?', 'why?' and 'how?' questions.
- Pronounce most words correctly, though they may still have difficulty with later sounds such as /r/ and /th/ and long words such as 'hospital' and 'spaghetti'.

Children who have developmental delay, a family history of speech, language or learning problems, a history of middle ear problems and children from multiple births (twins, triplets etc.) are at particular risk of developing communication problems.

**If you are concerned that your child cannot do some of these things** an assessment with a qualified speech pathologist can help by:

- Telling you where your child's development is compared with other children of the same age.
- Suggesting some strategies and activities to help your child develop the skills they need.

Support in the preschool years can be helpful in preventing further difficulties later on which can impact on your child's learning and literacy at school.

**There is more information on the Talking Matters website at [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)**

# What to expect at 4 1/2 years of age

*Four and a half year olds are confident communicators. They are speaking in sentences with most grammatical words used correctly. They are using most speech sounds correctly and their speech can be easily understood.*

## **Four and a half year olds should be able to:**

- Follow instructions with 4 or more key words “put your shoes and hat in your red bag”.
- Understand and answer ‘what?’, ‘who?’, ‘why?’ and ‘where?’ questions.
- Understand concepts including position words (in, on, under), size (big, little), number (more, lots, 1,2,3), colours and shapes.

## **Four and a half year olds should be able to:**

- Use sentences with mostly correct grammar.
- Use a wide range of words types including action words (eat, sit, run), describing words (hot, big, red, mine) and position words (in, on, under).
- Use conjunctions such as ‘and, then, so, because’ to join sentences together.
- Retell simple stories they know while looking at pictures in a book.
- Answer a range of questions.
- Their speech should be easy to understand with only a few sound errors.
- Use sentences of six words or more.
- Use grammar words including pronouns (he, she, I, you) and verb tenses (is eating, jumped, will jump) correctly.
- Use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things, make comments and ask questions.
- Four and a half year olds should also be beginning to develop awareness of words, letters and sounds such as their name.



**If you are concerned** an assessment with a qualified speech pathologist can help by:

- Telling you where your child’s development is compared with other children of the same age.
- Suggesting some strategies and activities to help your child develop the skills they need.

Support in the preschool years can be helpful in preventing further difficulties later on which can impact on your child’s learning and literacy at school.

**There is more information on the Talking Matters website at [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) about how to develop your child’s communication skills.**

# What to expect at 5 years of age

*Five year olds usually show well developed communication skills. They should be able to hold a conversation confidently with adults and other children. They should be able to use long sentences and join them together with words such as 'because' and 'but'. Most of their grammar should be correct though they may make occasional errors with words like 'feet' and 'fell'. They should be able to say words clearly, though they may still have difficulty with the /th/ and /r/ sounds.*

## **Five year olds should be able to:**

- Tell you what things are used for: "you cut things with scissors"
- Understand and use position words such as: on top, behind, through
- Tell their full name and address
- Use sentences of five to seven words or more
- Understand concepts and opposites such as: wet/dry, hard/soft
- Understand 'same' and 'different' and tell how objects are the same or different
- Count ten things and name colours
- Listen to and understand stories and retell them from the pictures
- Use past, present and future tense
- Use words such as 'he' and 'she' correctly
- Ask and answer 'why' and 'how' questions
- Describe their feelings with words such as: happy, sad, mad
- Understand time concepts such as 'before' and 'after'



**Five year olds are beginning school.** This means they should be ready for more formal teaching of literacy. Some of the skills needed for learning literacy include:

- Being able to hear beginning sounds in words
- Being able to match and make rhyming words
- Being able to clap or count the syllable beats in words
- Recognising letters and the sounds they make
- Being able to write their own name
- Understanding the structure of a story with a beginning, middle and end



If you are concerned about your child's communication skills or their readiness for school, a speech pathology assessment would be useful to help you learn how your child is progressing and what you can do to help them. For more information about speech and language assessments check the Talking Matters website at [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)

# Checklists and referral sheets



# Who should be referred for speech pathology?

Approximately 10% of children have language or learning difficulties and need more than day to day exposure to communication to realise their full potential. Time and time again research has shown that children who have extra needs get the most out of it when they are given help in the formative early years.

**Earlier support** for children who need it means children benefit from:

- Learning more quickly, as their brains are most ready to learn when they are younger.
- Feeling better about themselves knowing you are there to help.
- Reduced frustration and increased feelings of success.
- Shorter times in therapy.
- Better outcomes– early intervention helps children to reach their potential!



**If a child is not following the expected pattern of development** outlined in this manual, **or parents or educators have raised concerns** a discussion and assessment with a speech pathologist is recommended.

**A school aged child probably needs to see a speech pathologist if they:**

- Have difficulty listening or following instructions.
- Experience difficulties in making their ideas and feelings understood.
- Are unclear when speaking or have difficulty saying any sounds (except /r/, /th/, or /v/ which may still be developing).
- Are unable to tell you a story in a logical way that makes sense.
- Have difficulty answering day to day questions.
- Are struggling with learning to read or following the classroom routine.

If a **toddler** is not able to do the things outlined in the handouts in this book for their age group they should **see a speech pathologist**. Seeking some professional assistance early on in a child's life can often save a child from unnecessary difficulties and get them back on the right track. Some children need only a short period of therapy or some activities and guidance provided to their parents.

If a child's teacher or childcare worker raises concerns about a child's development they should be taken seriously and be properly investigated. Unfortunately children with difficulties are more often under identified and miss out on the help they need. Realising a child needs more assistance can be hard for a parent, however taking action is very important for the child's well being.

**If in any doubt the responsible thing to do is to consult a professional. Our children's formative years are too precious to gamble with.**

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Phone: 8255 7137 for appointments

Email: [office@talkingmatters.com.au](mailto:office@talkingmatters.com.au) Fax: 8219 0128



## Referral for paediatric speech pathology services

Please complete the following information and forward to Talking Matters for further management. If you have completed the age appropriate checklist with parents please include a copy for our reference. If the patient is being referred under a Team Care Arrangement please make referral to "Talking Matters Speech Pathologist" and the most appropriate speech pathologist will manage this client. This referral form is provided for your convenience but is not essential and you are welcome to refer in the manner most convenient to you.

**Patient name:**

**D.O.B.**

**Sex:**

**Parent name:**

**Phone:**

**Mobile:**

**Address:**

**Medicare no:**

**Private health fund:**

**Past Medical History (please include all relevant co-morbidities):**

**Medications:**

**Allergies:**

**Comments/ concerns:**

**Referring Dr Name:**

**Provider number:**

**Preferred method/address for contact:**



# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 12 month olds

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected to have** by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I will smile and look at others and be interested in what they are doing.
- ☐ I enjoy books and songs and like to spend time with others.
- ☐ I look for items that have been moved or hidden that I want.
- ☐ I copy actions and laugh at others.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I look when my name is called.
- ☐ I understand simple instructions like “no” “stop”, “sit down”.
- ☐ I can point to or give you familiar items when you say them (e.g. “bear, drink, book”).
- ☐ I recognise familiar sounds (e.g. door bell, dad’s car coming home, dog barking).
- ☐ I can show you one or two body parts.

### Speaking

- ☐ I can use at least one word consistently to convey meaning (e.g. “mum” “no”).
- ☐ I’m using some sounds for words (e.g. “baaa” “uuh, ooh” “brrmm”).
- ☐ Use a small range of sounds (e.g. /p/, /b/, /m/, /t/, /d/, /n/, /w/) and vowel sounds.
- ☐ I will ask for things by pointing, looking and will at least sometimes make a sound as well.
- ☐ I will copy simple sounds .
- ☐ I will shake my head for “no” and wave “hi” and “bye.”

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ Severe and/or recurrent ear infections or reduced response to their name or sounds.
- ☐ Lack of pointing or trying to use sounds to communicate.
- ☐ Reduced eye contact when being spoken to or lack of desire to engage with others.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor’s referral is needed.*

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 18 month olds

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected** to have by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I will try and show or tell people things until they understand me.
- ☐ I will point at things I want to do and look at people to help me get what I want.
- ☐ I can play with toys in different and imaginative ways (e.g. a box is for hiding in or banging on).
- ☐ I like to pretend to do things I see (e.g. talk on the phone, stir a cup of tea, brush my hair).

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I understand simple instructions like “give it to me”, “sit down”, “come here”.
- ☐ I can point to pictures of familiar things in a book (e.g. “Show me the cow”).
- ☐ I can show you a few body parts (e.g. ‘eyes, nose, mouth, head’).
- ☐ I understand about 50 words (familiar items such as ‘spoon’, ‘cup’, ‘dog’, ‘mum’).

### Speaking

- ☐ I can use between 5 and 20 words meaningfully even if not pronounced correctly.
- ☐ I use my small set of words generally (e.g. all animals might be ‘dog’).
- ☐ I will take turns playing simple games like ‘peek-a-boo’.
- ☐ I will ask for more using my words or actions.
- ☐ I will copy simple words “mama, dada, hi, bye, no”.
- ☐ I will say “no” and shake my head.

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ Severe and/or recurrent ear infections or reduced responses to name or unexpected sounds.
- ☐ Lack of pointing or trying to use sounds to communicate.
- ☐ Reduced eye contact when being spoken to or lack of desire to engage with others.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor’s referral is needed.*

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 2 years old

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected to have** by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I will try and copy things I see my family doing around the house.
- ☐ I am enjoying looking at simple picture books with a trusted adult.
- ☐ I like to sing simple songs like 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' and 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star'.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I understand simple instructions like "Put teddy on the bed", "Go and get your bear".
- ☐ I can show you less obvious body parts like 'eyebrow, elbow, lips'.
- ☐ I recognise less obvious words now, like 'button, buckle and shoelace'.
- ☐ I understand a lot more than I can say. I will be able to point to things when you say them even though I can't say them yet.

### Speaking

- ☐ I can use at least 50 words, preferably 100 or more.
- ☐ I am joining two words together now, such as "more juice", "daddy home".
- ☐ My parents will understand most of what I say even though it's not clear yet.
- ☐ I will use my name to talk about myself "Kate turn!"
- ☐ I will use some describing words, "big bear," "cold bath".
- ☐ I will start to talk about things that have happened or will happen "park later" "drink soon".

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ Lack of pretend playing, (not feeding dollies, pretending to talk on the phone etc.)
- ☐ Less than 50 words in their spoken vocabulary.
- ☐ Difficulties understanding others or following directions.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor's referral is needed.*

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 2 years 6 month old

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected to have** by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I make eye contact when spoken to and respond to questions.
- ☐ I will point at things I want to do and look at people to help me get what I want.
- ☐ I can play with toys in different and imaginative ways .
- ☐ I use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things and make comments.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I follow simple instructions like “Put your shoes in your bag”.
- ☐ I can point to pictures of familiar things in a book e.g. “Show me the cow”.
- ☐ I can show you objects by function “What do we eat with?”
- ☐ I understand more than 300 words.
- ☐ I understand ‘what’ and ‘where’ questions.
- ☐ I will point to most body parts.

### Speaking

- ☐ I can use more than 100 words meaningfully even if not pronounced correctly.
- ☐ I use simple grammar words such as ‘the’, ‘a’, ‘is’, ‘on’, ‘in’.
- ☐ I will combine 2 and 3 words together.
- ☐ I use many names of objects as well as action words ‘eat’, ‘sit’, ‘run’.
- ☐ I use some describing words ‘hot’, ‘big’ and ‘mine’.

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ Using less than 100 words in their speech.
- ☐ Doesn't seem interested in copying words they hear around them.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor's referral is needed.*

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 3 years old

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected to have** by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I enjoy favourite programs on TV and have favourite books and toys.
- ☐ I like to play with imagination e.g. I like to play dress ups.
- ☐ I like to pretend to do things I see e.g. talk on the phone, stir a cup of tea, brush my hair.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I understand more complex instructions like “Find the cup and put it in the blue box”.
- ☐ I understand basic size concepts (big, small), position concepts (in, on, under) and basic shapes (circle, square, triangle, star).
- ☐ I understand simple ‘wh’ questions, such as “What’s this?” and “Where’s baby”
- ☐ I understand what objects are used for, e.g.: “Show me something we brush our hair with”.

### Speaking

- ☐ I use words as my main means of communication but I still use some pointing and gesture also.
- ☐ I ask ‘why’ questions
- ☐ I can now be understood by my family and less familiar people when I speak.
- ☐ I enjoy telling stories and pretending to read books to others.
- ☐ I can say my full name, count to three and talk about things that have happened.
- ☐ I use ‘I’, ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘we’ and put plural –s on words e.g: cats, dogs.

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ Using short sentences of 2 words or less.
- ☐ Difficulties understanding what others are saying.
- ☐ Reduced eye contact, short attention span or poor behavior, which may be due to frustration.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor’s referral is needed.*

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 3 year 6 month old

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected to have** by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I will use language to greet people, ask for things and refuse things.
- ☐ I make good eye contact and check frequently for my secure adult when in strange places.
- ☐ I will seek out other children to play with and join their play effectively.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I understand and can name most common items.
- ☐ I can follow instructions with 3 key words “put your shoes and hat in your bag”.
- ☐ I can understand and answer ‘what,’ ‘who’ and ‘where’ questions.
- ☐ I understand a range of concept words including ‘in’, ‘on’, ‘under’, ‘big’, ‘little’, ‘more’ & ‘lots’.

### Speaking

- ☐ I use many action words (eat, sit, run), describing words (hot, big, red) and position words (in, on, under).
- ☐ I will use sentences of between four and six words in length.
- ☐ I will use grammar words including pronouns ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘I’, ‘you’ and articles ‘a’, ‘the’.
- ☐ I will link sentences together in simple sequences with ‘and’ and ‘then’.

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ Doesn’t respond consistently when spoken to
- ☐ Use of only 1 or 2 word utterances
- ☐ Reduced eye contact when being spoken to or lack of desire to engage with others
- ☐ Seems to be frustrated which may present as challenging behaviour
- ☐ Periods of dysfluency (or stuttering) that have been present for more than a couple of weeks.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor’s referral is needed.*



# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 4 years old

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected to have** by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I will make friends and play simple games with rules.
- ☐ I will play with imagination frequently.
- ☐ I will know how to start or join in a conversation and enjoy social communication.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I will reliably follow 2 part instructions e.g.: “get your shoes and put your hat on”.
- ☐ I will understand ‘why’ and ‘when’ questions.
- ☐ I will know shapes, colours and some numbers.
- ☐ I will follow up to 6 key words in a sentence.

### Speaking

- ☐ I can tell news in front of my class but I’ll need a little help.
- ☐ I will ask ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘where’ questions easily.
- ☐ I will use ‘and’, ‘then’, ‘because’ and ‘but’ to make longer more complex sentences.
- ☐ My grammar will be almost adult-like with only a few small errors.
- ☐ I will be understood by everyone now even though I may have a few speech immaturities.
- ☐ I will have an extensive vocabulary to express my ideas and ask questions.

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ A small vocabulary and use of short sentences. Sentences with grammatical errors.
- ☐ Unable to retell a simple story or something that has happened so it is easily understood.
- ☐ Difficulty understanding questions and following instructions. Doesn’t like listening to stories.
- ☐ Child’s speech can’t be clearly understood by a familiar listener. Multiple sound errors present.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor’s referral is needed.*

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 4 year 6 month old

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected to have** by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I will try and show or tell people things until they understand me.
- ☐ I will use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things, make comments and ask questions.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I understand and can follow instructions containing 4 or more key words.
- ☐ I understand a range of concepts including position words (in, on, under), size (big, little), number (more, lots, 1,2,3), colours and shapes.
- ☐ I am developing an awareness of words, letters and sounds such as my name.

### Speaking

- ☐ I can use sentences with mostly correct grammar.
- ☐ I use a wide range of word types including describing and position words.
- ☐ I use conjunctions such as 'and, then, because, so' to join sentences together.
- ☐ I will retell simple stories I know with the use of a book.
- ☐ I will use sentences of six words or more.
- ☐ I will answer a range of questions confidently.

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ Unclear speech or speech that isn't easily understood by an unfamiliar listener.
- ☐ Short sentences.
- ☐ Reduced communication or interactions with others.
- ☐ Difficulties following instructions that are understood by peers.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor's referral is needed.*

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 5 years old

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected to have** by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I enjoy communication with a variety of people and make friends easily.
- ☐ I engage in complex imaginary games with simple rules.
- ☐ I know how to join in and start conversations and interactions appropriately.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I can follow 3 step instructions eg: “get your pencils, put them in the tin and then line up near the door”.
- ☐ I can follow instructions that include the words ‘first’, ‘last’, ‘before’ and ‘after’
- ☐ I understand everything said to me that my peers also understand.
- ☐ I can answer ‘wh’ questions’.
- ☐ I understand humour and age appropriate jokes.

### Speaking

- ☐ I have an extensive vocabulary and express my ideas clearly.
- ☐ I speak clearly with only a few minor speech immaturities remaining.
- ☐ I can tell stories or give a morning talk without any help.
- ☐ I have long and detailed conversations with a variety of people on a variety of topics.
- ☐ I can explain why something happened and consider some solutions to problems.

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ Uses short or grammatically incorrect sentences or has a small vocabulary
- ☐ Difficulties following instructions, answering questions and problem solving
- ☐ Poor conversation skills, speech hard to understand, short attention span.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor’s referral is needed.*

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– 6 years old

This checklist provides an overview of skills children **are expected to have** by this age. Children who have **unchecked items in this first section** should be referred to a speech pathologist.

### Play and Social Skills

- ☐ I can play complex games and follow the rules
- ☐ I relate well to a range of people and can maintain a conversation on a topic for at least 5 turns
- ☐ I can work on a task or activity alone for at least 20 minutes without adult assistance
- ☐ I can use language to share information or feelings and solve problems.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ I listen to short stories with no pictures and to a lengthy story when there are pictures also.
- ☐ I can follow a series of instructions independently.
- ☐ I understand what my teacher is saying in my classroom and remember what I've been taught.

### Speaking

- ☐ I can talk clearly with no speech or articulation errors.
- ☐ I can use longer sentences with few if any grammatical errors.
- ☐ I can explain what I have done and things that have happened.
- ☐ I can retell a story, news or a series of events that will be clear and logical to the listener.
- ☐ I will ask complex questions to learn and find out information.
- ☐ I will use language to explain my feelings.

### Causes For Concern (referral recommended if any of these below are ticked)

- ☐ Short and/or ungrammatical sentences.
- ☐ Difficult to understand speech. If there are any sounds other than /th/ not used correctly.
- ☐ Difficulties sitting, paying attention in class and difficulties following directions.
- ☐ Literacy skills not developing on par with peer group.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor's referral is needed.*

# Talking Matters

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au) Ph.: 8255 7137 for an appointment  
Helping your child to reach their potential



## Referral Checklist– student over the age of 6

Children over the age of 6 who **have any checked items** in this first section should be referred to a speech pathologist for review.

### Literacy

- ☐ Difficulties with reading or spelling.
- ☐ Difficulties with reading comprehension.
- ☐ Difficulties getting their ideas down in writing or responding to written questions correctly.

### Listening and Understanding

- ☐ Difficulties following routines and or instructions in the classroom or at home.
- ☐ Difficulty listening or paying attention.
- ☐ Unorganised and seems to be forgetful.
- ☐ Difficulties with problem solving.

### Speaking

- ☐ Stuttering or dysfluent speech.
- ☐ Poor grammar and/or reduced vocabulary.
- ☐ Has trouble thinking of the words to use or seems to forget a word sometimes.
- ☐ Can not participate in a detailed conversation with another person in a variety of topics.
- ☐ Gets frustrated and sometimes gets physical when things go wrong.
- ☐ Doesn't always understand jokes, humour or idioms.
- ☐ If asked to generate a list of items in a category in one minute is unable to respond fluently.

### Other Causes For Concern

- ☐ Difficulties using appropriate eye contact.
- ☐ Very strong and intense interests in narrow fields of interest.
- ☐ More than expected difficulty relating to and getting along with others.

*\*Assessment by a speech pathologist is recommended if concerns are highlighted in this checklist. Making an appointment with Talking Matters is simple, just call our office on (08) 8255 7137 and our office staff will guide you through the process. No doctor's referral is needed.*

# Information for parents by age





# Communication tips for 18 month olds

*Toddler's love repetition and learn from it. They are happy to look at the same book, or do the same puzzle many times. They are happy to build and knock down blocks over and over, play peekaboo or put teddy in and out of bed many times over. By pairing repetitive games with words you give your child lots of chances to learn these words.*

## Some great activities for toddlers include:

- Stacking blocks: up, up, up, down
- Hiding and finding games: “where’s teddy?”, “there’s teddy!”
- Simple rhymes and songs that can be sung over and over
- Bright, sturdy books
- Shape sorters: in, in, in, out
- Simple wooden puzzles
- Toys with lights and noises
- Toys for pretending such as dolls, pots and pans, cars and trucks, animals



## Practise games and activities where you can repeat words over and over a number of times.

**Introduce books as early as possible.** Books are a great way to introduce new words to babies and early experiences set them up well for success at school. Toddlers love books with pictures of familiar items and young children as well as books with noises or textures to explore or flaps to open.

**Introduce simple pretending.** Use simple, familiar toys such as dolls or teddies with plastic food, cups and plates and a blanket for pretend feeding and sleeping. Use items from around the house such as bowls and spoons for pretending to cook. Encourage your child’s natural tendency to copy what they see you do and add some words as you play.

## Important tips for helping toddlers learn:

- Get down at your child’s level and play face to face with lots of eye contact.
- Copy what your child does and this will encourage them to copy you.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat: Repeat words, activities, stories and songs.
- Start where your child is and gradually move them forward. Start with the words you child can use and gradually add new ones. Start with toys and activities they can do and gradually add new ones. Start with books and songs they know and gradually add new ones.
- Follow your child’s interests. Watch what they like, what they choose and what makes them light up. Use these things to help them learn.



Have fun!

# Communication tips for 2 year olds

Two year olds are active and sociable and “into everything”. From around two years children go through a period of rapid growth in their communication skills, developing from a toddler experimenting with combining words to a three year old who can use sentences and hold simple conversations. Children who communicate better in turn interact better with others and manage their emotions and behaviour more effectively, so there are pay offs in the long run for helping your child develop good skills now. Here are some ideas to develop your child’s communication skills.

## To help your child develop word combinations:

- 1. Build a solid base of single words.** Children usually need around 50 single words before they begin this stage of developing two word combinations. Even after they begin to use two words they will need to continue to learn more single words to continue to develop their language skills. It is usually easier to learn a new word as a single word at this stage e.g. “zebra” then later combine it “baby zebra” “zebra eating” etc.
- 2. Develop a variety of word types.** Children begin by learning lots of names of people and things. To develop two word combinations they often need to combine these nouns with a different type of word such as an action word or a descriptive word. Action words are particularly important as they form the basis of sentences later on.

### Help your child learn a range of different words including:

- action words: eat, sleep, jump, dance, run;
- describing words: big, funny, sad, hot, wet;
- position words: up, in, under;
- possessive words: mine, yours.

- 3. Expand the single words your child does say by adding another word.** Try to repeat it a couple of times if you can.

Sometimes you might add another word you know they can say.

- e.g. Child “bye”  
Adult “**bye Dad**, Dad’s going shopping, **bye Dad**”.

Sometimes you might add a new word.

- e.g. Child “more”  
Adult “toast, **more toast**, you like the toast, **more toast**.”

Your child does not need to copy you, just hearing what you say will help and they will use that phrase when they are ready. If they do try to copy you though, respond positively. If what they say is not clear still be positive and say it again clearly for them e.g. child “more toat” Adult “yes **more toast**”.



# Communication tips for 2 year olds (cont.)

**Practise games and activities where you can repeat word combinations over and over a number of times.**

Activities could include;

- Bath time: wash + body part “wash face, wash arms, wash tummy”
- Mealtime: eat + food name “eat peas, eat carrots, eat meat”
- Dressing: clothing name + on “shirt on, pants on, socks on, hat on”
- Ball play: action + ball “roll ball, push ball, kick ball, catch ball”
- Car play: car + action/position “ car go, car stop, car up, car down”
- Block play “build up, more blocks, fall down”
- Matching games “Two apples, more dog”
- Outside play “Alex + run/jump/climb/slide” “Alex under/over/in/out/through”
- Hiding dolls or animals and finding them “hello teddy, goodbye puppy”



When your child does produce two words together all by themselves expand them to three words to keep them learning.

## **More ideas to develop language:**

- **Pretend play is great for developing language and social skills.** Two year olds are happy to be alongside you, copying the things they see you do every day. They could “cook” with a wooden spoon and some plastic bowls while you make tea, or “peg” some socks on the edge of the basket as you hang your clothes on the line. They can also pretend to look after teddies or dolls, copying the things you do with them such as feeding and bathing. These activities which children see repeated over and over are great for teaching action words and functions.
- **Talk out loud as you do jobs about the house.** Talk about what you are doing and what you are using and your child will learn all kinds of things. “I’m cutting the carrots, chop, chop, chop” “I need something to mix the gravy, what could I use, spoons are good for mixing”.
- **Sorting and tidying are great ways to practice concepts such as size, shape, colour and position words.** As you sort the washing you could talk about **size**. “here are the big socks and here are the little socks. Daddy’s socks are big and yours are little.” Picking up toys could be a way to develop **colours**, “here is a red block, let’s pick up all the red blocks first.” Putting away the dishes could help develop concepts of **shape**, let’s put the square containers here and the round ones here.” and **position** “let’s put the cups up the top and the pans down the bottom.” Bathing and dressing are great for learning to combine words, “arm in, leg in” “wash your face, wash your tummy”.
- While many skills can be taught to your child throughout the day, one activity that is really worth setting aside a few minutes each day for in a busy schedule is **reading to your child**. Those few minutes will pay off in the long term with more success at school and with your child developing a love of reading and learning.



# Communication tips for 2 1/2 year olds

*Two and a half year olds are learning to use words and phrases to express their developing independence. At times they may still rely on gestures and tone to add meaning and their pronunciation is still developing. They are copying lots of things from adults but are also able to combine words in new ways to say things they have not heard before. Here are some ideas to develop your child's communication skills.*

Two and a half year olds should be using hundreds of words and should be combining words into simple phrases of two to four words and beginning to use a few simple grammar structures such as “the, a, is and -ing”. They can follow simple instructions with a few key words and answer simple questions. Their speech should include a range of different speech sounds though they will still make many errors in the way they say things. Familiar people should understand much of what they say.

## By 2 1/2 years children can:

- use more than 100 words
- use many names of objects as well as action words (eat, sit, run) and describing words (hot, big, mine)
- understand more than 300 words
- follow simple instructions “put your shoes in your bag”
- point to objects by function “what do we eat with”
- point to most body parts
- use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things, make comments
- understand what and where questions
- combine two and three words together “my shoes” “want more drink”
- use simple grammar words such as “the, a, is, on, in, -ing”
- make eye contact when spoken to and respond to questions



## To help your child develop language skills

**1. Use modeling to fix up mistakes.** Children at this age are experimenting with speech sounds and with how to combine words into simple sentences. You can help them fine tune these skills by repeating back what they say and fixing the mistakes “he shoes” yes those are “**his** shoes”, “my tat” yes that’s your “**cat**”. Use a positive tone and emphasis the changes slightly to draw your child’s attention to the correct form. Repeat it a few times for extra practice “he’s your **cat**, he’s a big **cat**, pat the **cat**”.

**2. Expand what your child does say by adding another word.** You can make a word into a phrase, or a phrase into a simple sentence by adding a word to it. You can also help your child develop describing words by adding them to what your child says. “look mummy, dog” “Yes look at the **big** dog, a **big, brown** dog” Your child does not need to copy you. Just hearing what you say will help and they will use that new word when they are ready. If they do try to copy you though, respond positively.



## Communication tips for 2 1/2 year olds (cont.)

3. **Make use of activities around the house.** Two year olds love to 'help' and be involved in what you are doing. You can make use of household jobs to teach your child new language skills.

Some ideas include:

- Developing action words while cleaning: wash, wipe, scrub, spray
- Learning big and little while sorting washing
- Learning shapes and sizes while putting away the shopping
- Learning describing words while preparing dinner, including tastes, textures, sounds and smells
- Learning position words while tidying up, "put it in/on/under"



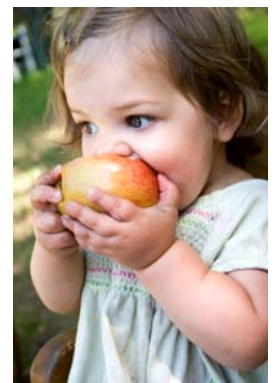
4. **Provide opportunities for pretending.** Use dolls, teddies, plastic food, cups, plates, and blankets for pretend feeding and sleeping. Use items from around the house such as bowls and spoons for pretending to cook. Use trucks, cars and blocks for pretend roads and traffic. Use plastic farm animals and fences, tractors and trucks. Sand and water play is also great for pretending. Toddlers also love dressing up. Pretending allows children to use language in different ways and to learn new words and concepts.

5. **Provide opportunities to mix with other children.** Two and a half year olds are developing an interest in other children but they still need adult help with sharing, taking turns, asking for and giving toys. Settings such as playgroups allow children to develop social skills in a fun, supportive setting and give mums support too. It is also a great way to learn new play activities, rhymes and songs as well.

6. **Expand your child's interest in books.** Toddlers who love simple, bright picture books are now ready to explore books with simple action stories such as 'Spot' books and Pamela Allen books. Your librarian can help you with suitable books for your child's age. Look for bright colours and simple stories of about one line to a page. Rhyme and repetition are great for this age to help toddlers learn to join in with the story.

### Important tips for helping your toddler learn:

- Get down to your child's level, play face to face with lots of eye contact and expression.
- Copy what your child does and add to it or expand it.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat: Repeat words, activities, stories and songs.
- Start where your child is and gradually move them forward. Start with the words you child can use and gradually add new ones. Start with toys and activities they can do and gradually add new ones. Start with books and songs they know and gradually add new ones.
- Follow your child's interests. Watch what they like, what they choose and what makes them light up. Use these things to help them learn.
- Care for your child's hearing. Follow up on ear infections and ask to see a specialist if your child has more than three ear infections in a year.



If you are concerned about your child or for more information check the Talking Matters Website on [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)

# Communication tips for 3 year olds

Three year olds are going through a rapid period of development in their communication skills. They move from combining words together to using “real” sentences. Their speech becomes clearer too, so that unfamiliar people, not just Mum and Dad can understand them.



## To develop your three year olds understanding:

- Talk at a level just above the level your child uses themselves. If your child uses sentences of three to five words, make yours just a little longer.
- Introduce new words, repeating the new word or idea a number of times to help your child learn and remember.
- Use the new word in different settings so that your child develops a deeper understanding of the word. For example to teach your child ‘heavy’ you might talk about the washing basket being heavy, the shopping being heavy, your child being heavy now they are bigger.
- Contrast concepts with their opposite. Empty the washing basket then talk about how it is now light.

## To develop your three year olds use of language:

- Repeat your child’s sentences back to them now and then fixing up any mistakes. “I **cutted** it” “Yes, you **cut** it, well done”. This will help them gradually learn adult grammar and pronunciation. Gently emphasise your change but make sure you also sound interested and positive.
- Add extra words and ideas to what your child says; “I found a **sock**” “You found a **big, blue sock**, let’s find another one to match. Let’s find another **big, blue sock**”.
- Most importantly listen to what your child has to say and make talking together a positive time for both of you.

## Ideas for developing language skills:

- **Out and about.** Obstacle courses and treasure hunts are free, lots of fun and can be done inside or out at home, in the backyard or in the playground. They are a great way to develop your child’s ability to listen, follow instructions and learn position words such as in, on, under, around, next to and through. Just hide some things for your child to find or set up a course for them to follow then give simple instructions. Gradually make the instructions longer and more complicated.





# Communication tips for 3 year olds (cont.)

## Ideas for developing language skills:

- **Craft.** Craft activities are great for teaching concepts such as colour, size, shape, texture. Try painting and play dough to develop concepts and try making a collage for listening skills and following instructions.
- **Stories.** Stories teach children so much that they should be a part of every child's daily routine. For three year olds try stories with a simple series of actions to help them learn to link sentences and ideas together. Stories with rhythm and rhyme keep young children involved and lead to the development of early literacy skills. Help your child practise listening and answering what and where questions by finding things in the pictures.
- **Pretend play.** Three year olds love to pretend and to copy adults. Pretending allows children to learn and practise new words and communication skills and to use familiar ideas in new ways. A collection of toys for pretending such as tea or cooking sets, farm animals, dolls or teddies, cars or trucks are toys that your child will use over and over. The way your child uses them will change, grow and develop with your child so they are good value for money. You can also use things about the house to play shops, make cubbies, play puppets and play dress-ups for more pretending. Don't forget to join in your child's play so you can talk with them about what they are doing.
- **Helping around the house.** Three year olds love to help adults and if you can involve them in some of your daily activities you can help them learn action and function words at the same time. Talk about what you do and what they are doing. Get them involved; in sorting washing into big and little, counting and sorting colours as they hand you the pegs, learning new words as you put away the shopping. Get them involved in some gardening and cooking too as they can be fun ways to learn.



## Important tips for helping children to learn language:

- Get down at your child's level and play face to face with lots of eye contact.
- Copy what your child does and this will encourage them to copy you.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat: Repeat words, activities, stories and songs. Repetition aids learning.
- Start at the level your child is currently talking at and gradually move them forward. Start with the words and sentence length your child can currently use and gradually extend them. Start with toys and activities they can do and gradually add new ones. Start with books and songs they know and gradually add new ones.
- Follow your child's interests. Watch what they like, what they choose and what makes them light up. Use these things to help them learn.

# Communication tips for 3 1/2 year olds

*Three and a half year olds are becoming confident communicators. They are speaking in sentences and unfamiliar listeners can understand most of what they say. Here are some ideas to develop your child's communication skills.*

Three and a half year olds should be using simple sentences of four to six words and grammar structures such as “he, she, the, a, is and -ing” though their grammar will not always be correct. They can follow instructions with three key words. They can ask and answer a range of questions. Their speech should be able to be understood most of the time, though they will still make errors with some sounds.

## By 3 1/2 years children can:

- understand and say the name of most common items
- understand and answer what, who and where questions
- use sentences of four to six words
- use grammar words including pronouns (he, she, I, you), articles (a, the) and verb tenses (**is eating**, jumped)
- use many action words (eat, sit, run), describing words (hot, big, red, mine) and position words (in, on, under)
- follow instructions with 3 key words “put your **shoes** and **hat** in your **bag**”
- use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things, make comments and ask questions
- understand concepts including position (in, on, under), size (big, little), and number (more, lots)
- link sentences together in simple sequences with “and” and “then”



## To help your child develop language skills

**1. Use modeling to fix up mistakes.** Children at this age are still refining speech sounds and learning how to use grammar to combine words into sentences. You can help fine tune these skills by repeating back what they say and fixing the mistakes “he got him shoes” “yes, he got **his** shoes”, “my tat” “yes that’s your **cat**”. Use a positive tone and emphasise the changes slightly to draw your child’s attention to the correct form. Repeat it a few times for extra practice “he’s your **cat**, he’s a big **cat**, pat the **cat**”.

**2. Expand what your child does say by adding another word.** You can help your child learn to use longer and more complex sentences by adding a word to what they say. “Mummy look a big dog” “Yes look a big, **brown** dog” Your child does not need to copy you. Just hearing what you say will help and they will use that new word when they are ready. If they do try to copy you though, respond positively.

**3. Introduce simple craft activities.** Three year olds are beginning to enjoy drawing, painting, gluing and play dough and you can use these activities to teach your child new language skills.

Some ideas include:

- Learning colours and shapes by pasting shapes cut from coloured paper or while painting.
- Learning to sort and group items by categories such as food, clothes and toys by cutting and pasting pictures from catalogues.
- Learning describing words while drawing and painting with different sizes, colours and shapes.
- Learning position words while pasting items into a picture “put it in/on/under”.

## Communication tips for 3 1/2 year olds (cont.)

**4. Continue to develop more complex pretending.** Pretending allows children to use language in different ways and to learn new words and concepts. Many three year olds have mastered pretending with simple daily activities such as mealtimes and bedtimes. Try expanding their pretend play skills by acting out themes such as shopping, going to the doctor, dentist, hairdresser or cafe, a trip to the zoo or the beach.

**5. Provide opportunities to talk about experiences with others.** Learning to talk about things that happened in the past and in other settings is an important pre-literacy skill. You can help your child to learn to do this by taking photos of their experiences and helping them to show and talk about these with friends or relatives. Photos of outings, your child making things or doing interesting activities are a great tool to expand their communication skills. Helping your child to show things they have made and talk about how they did it is also a good skill to practise.

**6. Expand your child's interest in books.** Three year olds enjoy simple action stories and can begin to 'tell' familiar stories back to you from the pictures. Don't just read the story, talk about it and ask your child questions. Rhyme and repetition are still important at this age and help with learning to retell and to practise predicting what will happen next.

**7. Help your child learn to link sentences together.** Continue to talk to your child as you do daily activities but now tell your child a couple of things at a time. "I am going to make you a sandwich then make me some coffee". Describe what your child is doing in a couple of sentences "You fed the dog and gave him a pat". Introduce your child to simple, familiar sequences "Let's put the bread in the toaster, then put on butter and jam and then we can eat it".

### Important tips for helping your preschooler learn:

- Get down to your child's level, play face to face with lots of eye contact and expression.
- Copy what your child does and add to it or expand it.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat: Repeat words, activities, stories and songs.
- Start where your child is and gradually move them forward. Start with the words your child can use and gradually add new ones. Start with toys, activities, books and songs they know and gradually add new ones.
- Follow your child's interests. Watch what they like and what makes them light up. Use these to help them learn.
- Care for your child's hearing. Follow up on ear infections and ask to see a specialist if your child has more than three ear infections in a year.

If you are concerned about your child's communication a speech pathologist can help with an assessment, advice and ideas to help your child learn. For more information visit [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)



# Communication tips for 4 year olds

Many four year olds are confident communicators who speak clearly and fluently in long and complex sentences. If you are concerned that your child does not speak as well as they should or just want to help them get ready for success at school here are some ideas to help your child develop strong communication skills:

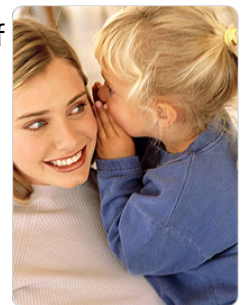
**To develop your four year olds understanding** try to talk at a level just above the level your child uses themselves. If your child uses sentences of five words, make yours just a little longer. Introduce new words and concepts as you talk with your child. Repeat the new word or idea a number of times to help your child learn and remember. Use the new word in different settings so that your child develops a deeper understanding of the word.



**To develop your four year olds use of language** repeat back their sentences to them now and then fixing up any mistakes. “I’ve got cold **foots**” “Cold **feet**, oh no let get some warm socks”. This will help them gradually learn adult grammar and pronunciation. Gently emphasize your change but make sure you also sound interested and positive. Also add extra words and ideas to what your child says; “I found a **sock**” “You found a **long, striped sock**, let’s find another one to match, let’s find another **long, striped sock**”. Most importantly listen to what your child has to say and make talking together a positive time for both of you.

## Ideas for developing language skills

- **Play word games** such as: “I went to the shop and I bought ....” Each person must repeat what has previously been bought before adding their own to the list. If your child finds it difficult to remember what is said cut pictures from junk mail to make cards and turn over the cards in turn and name them as you play. Try variations such as I went to the zoo, jungle, park, beach etc.
- **Go for a walk and talk about the things you see.** Collect things to bring home and keep such as: feathers, stones, leaves. Look at them closely maybe with a magnifying glass and talk about the colour, shape, texture, size and weight of each thing.
- **Play hide and seek with toy animals or dolls.** Once they are found talk about who was found where i.e.: “The horse was under the big, blue chair”. Use lots of describing and position words.
- **Make some sequence cards.** Use a digital camera to take a series of photos of your child doing familiar activities such as brushing their teeth or making toast. Print them out, cut them up and see if your child can put them in order and tell you what they are doing.
- **Make your own books.** Take your camera along on an outing and take a series of photos through the day. When you come home print them out and slip into a mini photo album. With your child write a sentence or two for each picture. Use a story beginning structure of “when, who and where” e.g. One day Max went to the beach” and an ending structure with a feeling word or two “at night-time Max went home feeling happy and tired”. Write your story in past tense and use some feeling words, describing words and direct speech “Max said “Wow”. These will help your child understand how stories are structured, an important pre-literacy skill.





# Communication tips for 4 1/2 year olds

*Four and a half year olds are confident communicators. They are speaking in sentences with most grammar used correctly. They are using most speech sounds correctly and their speech can be easily understood. Here are some ideas to develop your child's communication skills.*



**1. Expose your child to the world of letters, sounds and words.** Four year olds are beginning to become aware and interested in sounds, letters and words. You can help your child prepare for learning to read and write at school by developing this awareness.

Some ideas include:

- Talking about your child's name by writing, tracing and copying it and talking about the letters and the sounds they make. Look for these letters and sounds in different places and words.
- Playing with plastic letters, making letters out of play dough, playing with letter stickers or stamps.
- Cutting and pasting letters and words from magazines and catalogues.
- Looking at words in the world around you, on signs and in books and talking about them.
- Making a scrapbook and pasting pictures that start with the same sound on the same page.
- Reading rhyming books and making up your own rhymes
- Talking about long and short words and clapping and counting the syllables.

**2. Try introducing some simple board games.** Board games can help develop concentration and social skills like turn-taking. They can also be helpful for developing language skills and other skills such as counting. Try playing with a child and an adult initially then introduce another child to help develop cooperation, sharing and being a good winner and loser.

**3. Expand your child's knowledge using books.** Four year olds can enjoy books with a true "story" structure and can "tell" familiar stories back to you from the pictures. Don't just read the story, talk about how stories have a beginning, middle and an end. Talk about the way a story is usually about a person trying to solve a problem. Talk about the way a book works such as where the title is and how to turn the pages. Point to the words as you read and talk about them now and then "look at this long word it says..." "Look at this letter. It is the same as your name starts with". Rhyme and repetition are still important at this age and help with learning to retell and to practice predicting what will happen next. Talk to your child about other ways that writing is used to such as in letters, advertisements, emails, message and birthday cards.

**4. Help your child learn to link sentences together.** Talk about things that you do that have a number of steps and take some photos showing the steps. Help your child to put the pictures in order and retell what they did. Try this with outings, craft activities, cooking, gardening or special events such as birthdays. Retelling in this way is good practise for linking sentences in writing later on.

## **Important tips for helping your preschooler learn:**

- Follow your child's interests. Watch what they like and use these to help them learn.
- Care for your child's hearing. Follow up on ear infections and ask to see a specialist if your child has more than three ear infections in a year.
- If you are concerned about your child's communication a speech pathologist can help with an assessment, advice and ideas to help your child learn. For more information visit [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)

# Communication tips for 5 year olds

*Five year olds usually show well developed communication skills. They should be able to hold a conversation confidently with adults and other children. They are getting ready for the next stage of language, literacy!*

## **Five year olds should be able to:**

- Tell you what things are for: “you cut things with scissors”
- Understand and use position words such as: on top, behind, through
- Tell their full name and address
- Use sentences of five to seven words or more
- Understand concepts and opposites such as: wet/dry, hard/soft
- Understand ‘same’ and ‘different’ and tell how objects are the same or different
- Count ten things and name colours
- Listen to and understand stories and retell them from the pictures
- Use past, present and future tense
- Use words such as ‘he’ and ‘she’ correctly
- Ask and answer ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions
- Describe their feelings with words such as: happy, sad, mad
- Understand time concepts such as ‘before’ and ‘after’



**Five year olds are beginning school.** This means they should be ready for more formal teaching of literacy. Some of the skills needed for learning literacy include:

- Being able to hear beginning sounds in words
- Being able to match and make rhyming words
- Being able to clap or count the syllable beats in words
- Recognising letters and the sounds they make
- Being able to write their own name
- Understanding the structure of a story with a beginning, middle and end

**To develop your five year olds understanding** try to talk at a level just above the level your child uses themselves. If your child uses sentences of five words, make yours just a little longer. Introduce new words and concepts as you talk with your child. Repeat the new word or idea a number of times to help your child learn and remember. Use the new word in different settings so that your child develops a deeper understanding of the word.

**To develop your five year olds use of language** repeat back their sentences to them now and then fixing up any mistakes. “I’ve got cold **foots**” “Cold **feet**, oh no let get some warm socks”. This will help them gradually learn adult grammar and pronunciation. Gently emphasize your change but make sure you also sound interested and positive. Also add extra words and ideas to what your child says; “I found a **bug**” “You found a **tiny, green bug**, let’s look for another one, let’s find another **tiny, green, bug**”. Most importantly listen to what your child has to say and make talking together a positive time for both of you.





# Communication tips for 5 year olds (cont.)

## Help your five year old develop language skills by:

**Immersing your child in language.** Talk together as often as you can. Talk about what your child has done in the day and what you have done. Talk about what they play with, draw and watch on TV. Talk together as you do household tasks, encouraging your child to be involved as you cook, clean, shop and garden.

**Encouraging your child to share their experiences using language.** Encourage your child to share what they have seen, done and made with others. Call Grandma and tell her what you did at school. Show dad what you drew and tell him all about it. Talking with others about something that happened in another time and place helps develop 'decontextualised language', the ability to talk about something that happened in another context. This is an important pre literacy skill. Give your children something concrete to talk about to start with. Help them show something they drew or made and talk about it or use photos or video clips of things you have done to share with family and friends.

## Helping your child learn to link sentences into "texts".

A text is something more than a sentence. A text can be:

- a 'procedure', how to do something such as how to make toast
- a recount, telling about something you have done
- a narrative or story
- a description
- a discussion, explanation or argument



Children who can link sentences together when they are talking do better when they have to write texts. You can practise making texts when talking about daily activities such as:

- describing how you did something such as a craft or cooking activity
- recounting an event or outing
- retelling a story from the pictures in a book
- describing an object to someone
- explaining why you did something or why you should do something

## Linking your child's spoken language to written language by:

- practising writing your child's name together and write it on things that belong to them
- looking at the words on signs, labels, advertising, magazines and books and talking about them together
- providing a variety of reading and writing materials for your child to use such as paper, note pads, pencils, books, magazines, letter puzzles and games
- making your own books using photos of your child's experiences and writing the words together.
- reading lots of stories and talking about the story but also about the words and the way the book is written, such as a title at the front, words telling about the pictures, the name of the author, the way the story has a beginning, middle and end.



Check the Talking Matters website for more ideas on language and literacy.

# Developmental issues



# What is autism?

*Autism is becoming more commonly spoken about yet one person with autism may be very different to the next; so what actually is autism?*

Autism is considered a “pervasive developmental disorder”. “Pervasive” meaning it effects all areas of a person’s life and “developmental” meaning it begins in early childhood. It is also considered part of the “autism spectrum”. “Spectrum” meaning it can include a wide range of characteristics, abilities and challenges. So adults and children with autism do vary widely in their learning ability, behaviour and other characteristics yet all share some common challenges. All people on the “autism spectrum” have difficulties with social interaction, communication and restricted or repetitive interests or activities.

**Difficulties with social impairment** can vary from being withdrawn and avoiding social contact through to people who try to interact with others but appear odd or inappropriate at times.

They may:

- have difficulty understanding the thoughts and feelings of others
- lack sympathy or empathy
- have difficulty understanding how to behave in social situations
- not understand the unwritten rules of social interaction
- have difficulty with the social aspects of play with other children
- have difficulty using and understanding eye contact and facial expressions
- have difficulty joining in with others and sharing toys and games
- may prefer to play alone and may like to do things their own way
- have difficulty taking into account the needs and interests of others.



**Difficulties with communication** can vary from people who have no speech or very limited communication through to people who can speak very well but may have difficulty with the social aspects of communicating.

They may:

- have difficulty taking turns in a conversation
- dominate the interaction or get stuck on a favourite topic
- be very literal and not understand more abstract meanings
- ask excessive questions
- repeat things that they have heard somewhere else such as on TV or in a movie.
- not understand that certain topics are not appropriate in certain places or with certain people
- may appear blunt or inappropriate
- have difficulty with the nonverbal aspects of communicating such as facial expressions and tone of voice, use a flat or unusual tone or even sound as though they have an accent



# What is autism? (contd)

**Restricted and repetitive interests and activities** can vary widely depending on the person.



They may:

- have a strong focus on one, or a limited range of activities
- focus on a topic such as dinosaurs, transport timetables or ancient Egypt
- focus on a certain movie, TV show or character
- focus on a simple activity such as watching an object spin, or lining things up
- show an intense level of interest and spend long periods of time doing their activity
- have little interest in other activities not related to their topic of choice
- spend most of their free time doing, talking about or thinking about their interest.

**Some other characteristics** which many people with autism show are:

- unusual or repetitive movements such as: flapping, rocking, toe walking, finger movements
- repetitive movements with objects such as spinning, lining up, sorting, flicking
- repeatedly turning things on and off or opening and shutting things
- sensory issues such as sensitivity to noises, smells, textures, certain clothes or foods.

All people with autism share these three areas of difficulty, but have their own personality, and vary according to their intelligence level, family and cultural background. Some may have another diagnoses such as ADHD, intellectual disability or learning problems while others do not. As Sue Larkey states on her website “to know a person with autism is not to know autism”.

<http://www.suelarkey.com>

**Each person with autism requires support and understanding tailored to their own unique needs.**

## Common questions

**If I think my child has autism what do I do?** The Talking Matters website has details about the process in South Australia. In other areas ask your doctor to be referred to a paediatrician that specialises in autism.

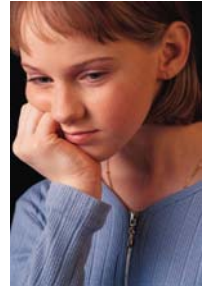
**Will my child grow out of it?** Autism is a lifelong condition so people do not grow out of it. They do however learn and develop, their needs and abilities change over time and with support many people with autism lead full and happy lives. Support in adulthood may vary from being fully dependant to needing just a little support with relationships. The more support children receive when they are younger the better they will do when they are older.

**What kind of support does my child need?** Support needs vary from child to child so each child should be individually assessed to determine what is most important for them. Many children benefit from speech pathology for communication skills, occupational therapy for fine motor and sensory issues and psychology for behaviour. These professionals also help children to develop social skills.

**What causes autism?** Autism is thought to be at least partly genetic as it tends to run in families. Scientists are not yet clear about the exact genes or causes of autism as yet however it is clear that autism is not caused by the upbringing of the child.

# What is Asperger's Syndrome?

*More children and even some adults are being diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome but what exactly is this? Asperger's syndrome is considered a 'pervasive developmental disorder'. 'Pervasive' meaning it affects all areas of a person's life and 'developmental' meaning it begins in childhood, though it may not be diagnosed until much later. It is also considered part of the 'autism spectrum'. 'Spectrum' meaning it can include a wide range of characteristics, abilities and challenges.*



Adults and children on the autism spectrum vary widely in their learning ability, behaviour and other characteristics; yet all share some common challenges. All people on the “autism spectrum” have difficulties with social interaction, communication and restricted or repetitive interests or activities. Unlike some people on other parts of the autism spectrum people with Asperger's syndrome do not have an intellectual disability or delayed language development. They have a normal or above IQ and their early communication development is not delayed. It is this that makes Asperger's syndrome different from “classic autism”. They do however share, with others with autism, difficulties in social interaction, communication and restricted or repetitive interests or activities. Because of their intelligence and more developed language skills the way these difficulties present may be different to others with more significant language and learning issues.

**Difficulties with social impairment** can include:

- being withdrawn and avoiding social contact
- trying to interact with others but appear odd or inappropriate at times
- having difficulty understanding the thoughts and feelings of others, lacking sympathy or empathy
- difficulty understanding how to behave in social situations
- not understanding the unwritten rules of social interaction or in the case of children, social play
- difficulty using eye contact and facial expressions in a social way and understanding the expressions of others and having difficulty joining in with others and sharing toys and games
- preferring to play alone, doing things their own way and having difficulty taking into account the interests of others.

**Though language skills are not delayed people with Asperger's do have communication difficulties.**

They may speak very well but may have difficulties with the social aspects of communicating such as:

- difficulty taking turns, dominating a conversation, getting stuck on a favourite topic
- being very literal and not understanding more abstract meanings
- asking excessive questions or repeating things that they have heard on TV or in a movie
- not understanding that some things are not appropriate to talk about at certain times or places
- may appear blunt or inappropriate
- difficulty with non-verbals such as eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice
- may use a flat or unusual tone or even sound as though they have an accent

**Restricted and repetitive interests and activities can vary from person to person.** What people with Asperger's have in common is a strong focus on one, or a limited range of activities. This may range from topics such as dinosaurs, transport timetables, space or ancient Egypt, to a certain movie, TV show or character. The level of their interest is intense and they spend long periods of time with their favourite activity. Often this means that they have little interest in other activities not related to their topic of choice and spend most of their free time doing, talking about or thinking about their interest.



# What is Asperger's Syndrome? (contd)

**Some other characteristics** which some people with Asperger's may include;

- unusual or repetitive movements such as: flapping, rocking, toe walking,
- hand or finger movements,
- repetitive movements with objects such as spinning, lining up, sorting, flicking, repeatedly turning things on and off or opening and shutting things.

**Many people with Asperger's also have sensory issues** such as sensitivity to noises, smells, textures, certain clothes or foods.



**All people with Asperger's share these areas of difficulty, but have their own personality, and vary according to their intelligence level, family and cultural background.** Some may have other diagnosis such as ADHD, learning difficulties such as dyslexia while others do not. While people with Asperger's have challenges they also have strengths. Tony Attwood speaks of people with Asperger's being 'different not disabled'. He states that they often have "a strong desire to seek knowledge, truth and perfection" show "considerable attention to detail" are "renowned for being direct, speaking their mind and being honest and determined and having a strong sense of social justice".

Each person with Asperger's requires support and understanding tailored to their own unique needs. People with Asperger's often need support to manage their emotions and understand the emotions of others and may need support with relationships.

## Common questions

**If I think my child has Asperger's what do I do?** The process for getting a diagnosis and follow up support varies depending on where you live. The Talking Matters website has details about the process in South Australia. In other areas ask your doctor to be referred to a paediatrician that specialises in autism spectrum disorders.

**Will my child grow out of it?** Asperger's is a lifelong condition so people do not grow out of it. They do however learn and develop. Needs and abilities change over time and with support people with Asperger's lead full and happy lives. The more support children receive when they are younger the better they will do when they are older.

**What kind of support does my child need?** Support needs vary from child to child so each should be individually assessed to determine what is most important for them. Many children benefit from speech pathology for communication skills, occupational therapy for fine motor and sensory issues and psychology for behavioural issues. Children benefit from support to understand and manage emotions and to learn social skills.

**If my child is bright and doing well at school, do they need a diagnosis?** Parents often worry about 'labelling' their child. A label will not change a child. They will still be the same person with the same mix of skills, challenges and personality. A label can however help others to understand the child better and can sometimes help the child to access more appropriate support. Sometimes when children do not have a diagnosis they are incorrectly labelled 'rude' or 'naughty' because of their social challenges. If a child has a label parents do not need to share this with everyone. A child's diagnosis need only be shared when there is an advantage for the child to do so.



# What is a speech sound difficulty?

*Speech sound delays or disorders are diagnosed when there are problems with the way a child uses sounds in their speech. Sometimes the sounds are not produced and other times they are not produced correctly or are not used correctly in words. Most children who are developing sounds as expected can be understood by strangers by three years of age and typically reach an adult level of speech sound use at around 7 to 8 years.*

As children learn to talk like adults, they have predictable differences in the way they use sounds when compared to adults. While most children follow these predictable patterns, some children are slower to learn the adult forms, and may have a speech sound delay. For example children have difficulty as 3 year olds saying clusters of sounds (e.g. 'drink' would become 'dink', 'frog' would become 'fog' etc.). However if a child continues to do this when they are 4 years of age it would be considered a speech sound delay.

Other children say sounds in words in a way that does not follow the typical patterns of speech development. For example, a child who leaves beginning sounds off words so that 'dog' becomes 'og' or 'cat' becomes 'at' is not following the expected pattern of development and is considered to have disordered speech. Children with disordered speech can be especially hard to understand at times.

There are a number of different types of speech sound disorders and these require different treatment approaches. Speech pathologists are able to determine the type of speech sound difficulty your child has and advise the best treatment to get your child back on track.

Children need to practice a range of sounds so they can learn to string them together into words. Children need to hear sounds many times before they are able to try and make them. Below are some guidelines of when sounds typically develop so you know which sounds your child needs to be hearing the most.

## Typical ages for sounds to develop are

3 years – m, n, h, p, w, d, g, y, k, f, b, t

4 years – sh, ch, j, l, s

5 years – r, v

6 years – z

8 years – th



An assessment is recommended if your child:

- Is not using the sounds listed above by the expected age.
- Is hard for parents to understand at age 2 years.
- Is hard for strangers to understand at age 3 years.
- Leaves many sounds off the beginning of words from age 2 years.
- Leaves sounds off the ends of words from 2 ½ years.
- Uses only a few sounds e.g. many sounds replaced with “d” after 2 1/2 years.
- Has an unusual quality in their sounds when speaking e.g. nasally or slushy.

Speech therapy is effective in developing correct speech patterns and early intervention usually means quicker progress. Children with long term speech difficulties may develop difficulties with learning to read and write at school. Therapy which begins in the toddler or preschool years is recommended.

# What is a language delay or disorder?

Language is a set of skills that children develop and use throughout their life. It relates to using words, sounds and symbols to send and receive messages with another person. Language development begins before a child's first birthday when they begin to understand what others are saying and begin to communicate using gestures, movements and sounds.



Around one year the first 'real words' usually begin and development continues throughout life. Children's development of language depends on many things both within and outside of the child. It is affected by health issues such as hearing, prematurity, general wellbeing, disabilities and family history of language difficulties. The child's experiences at home, child care and school also affect how their language develops. When a child has difficulties developing language there are often a number of things involved. There are also many things that can be done to help the child develop language.

Receptive language refers to the child's ability to understand the language that others use. This includes understanding words and sentences in order to learn new things, following instructions, answering questions and later on to understanding and remembering things that are read. Children with receptive language difficulties may have difficulties in some or all of these areas.

Expressive language refers to the child's ability to express needs and ideas to others. Children who have difficulty using words or formulating sentences can find it hard to communicate with others and may become frustrated or withdrawn. Later on they may also have difficulty expressing themselves in writing. Both receptive and expressive language skills are important as children develop.

The number and complexity of words and concepts a child understands and uses has a major impact on their learning. The way we put language together into sentences is consistent and rule based and children take time to learn all of the rules. Sentences such as "the mouses runned" show children are beginning to learn the rules but are not yet at an adult level. Children also need to learn how to use language in a social setting, such as when holding a conversation. Children take time to develop these skills also and while most develop these skills through social contact others need specific help and teaching to develop these skills.

Some signs a child may be having difficulties with language skills include:

- Not showing the same level of skills as others of the same age.
- Difficulties with following instructions or answering questions.
- Difficulty explaining things or retelling experiences.
- Difficulties forming sentences, or spelling when writing.
- Difficulties relating to peers, making and keeping friendships.
- Not progressing with learning, reading or understanding what they read.



If there is concern about a child's development in any of these areas a formal language assessment with a speech pathologist can help to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses. Speech pathologists can then suggest ways to develop skills as well as strategies to help the individual child to communicate effectively at home and school.

# What is stuttering?

*Stuttering is a disruption in the flow of speech. Research indicates that stuttering occurs in around 5% of children under the age of five years. Stuttering is not related to the child's personality or intelligence and is not caused by the way parents interact with their child. Stuttering is most easily and effectively treated in the preschool years. Older children also benefit from seeing a speech pathologist if they stutter however treatment may take longer.*

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines stuttering as a “disorder in the rhythm of speech, in which the individual knows precisely what he wishes to say, but at the time is unable to say it because of an involuntary, repetitive prolongation or cessation of a sound”. Stuttering is more common in boys than girls, has a genetic link and is thought to be related to the processing of messages in the brain. The exact cause is unknown and may vary between individuals.

Stuttering most commonly begins between the ages of two and five years. Some children in this age range go through a period of ‘normal non-fluency’- stuttering that disappears in time without therapy. It is hard to tell which children will grow out of stuttering and which will continue to have difficulties. Any child who is stuttering for 3 to 6 months or more should have an assessment with a speech pathologist as therapy is most effective in the preschool years.

## Stuttering behaviours

Each child's pattern is different. Children who stutter will show at least one or more of these behaviours:

- **Repetitions:** These can be of sounds “I want a b-b-b-banana”; syllables “I want a ba-ba-ba-banana”; whole words “I want-want-want a banana”; or phrases “I want a - I want a - I want a banana”. They can be in the beginning, middle and ends of sentences, but beginnings are most common.
- **Blocking:** This is when airflow stops and the child has difficulty getting any sound out.
- **Prolongations:** This is when the child seems to stretch a sound out “I waaaaaaaaaant a banana”.
- **Interjections:** These are the frequent use of words like “um”. “I um, um, um want um, um, um a banana”.
- **Other behaviours** can include tightness in the muscles of the face, movements in the face such as blinking, body movements, reduced eye contact and avoiding certain words or talking in certain situations.



**Remember if you are at all concerned about your child's speech pattern contact a speech pathologist as treatment is most effective in the preschool years.**

# Can a speech pathologist help with feeding?

*Some children are very sensitive to different textures in their mouth and on their faces. They may also have poor awareness of where their various oral structures are. These children often gag on food, are messy eaters and later in life often develop speech sound difficulties.*

**Speech pathologists are the specialists trained in assessing, diagnosing and treating feeding difficulties.** Speech pathologists use their knowledge of muscles, nerves and processes that need to occur for successful chewing and swallowing. With the right advice, support and equipment your child can be on the way to becoming a better eater.

## Feeding difficulties

By helping your child to overcome their feeding difficulties you ensure:

- Your child gets the best range of healthy foods to support their development and long term health.
- A less stressful mealtime for the whole family.
- Reduced chance of developing speech sound difficulties which are often observed in children with feeding issues.
- Increased development in other areas such as sensory perception, fine motor skills and independence.
- More time and energy to enjoy your child as they grow up.



## Signs of possible feeding issues

Feeding difficulties take many forms but these are some signs a consultation may be needed

- Drooling or spilling food from the mouth when eating or drinking.
- Difficulties chewing or moving food around in the mouth.
- Difficulty transitioning from purees, to soft lumps, to foods requiring chewing, or refusal of solids.
- Lengthy or tedious mealtimes.
- Coughing or choking when eating.



## Initial assessments

An initial assessment is required so the speech pathologist can gather information and observe your child eating. This allows us to plan the best support and feeding program for your child. Feeding assessments are conducted in our office and usually take 1 hour.

Before you come for your first appointment you will be asked to organize a specific range of foods and drinks to bring along to the assessment. The food will vary depending on the age of the child but will generally include a range of textures.

## Appointments

Making an appointment to get started is easy. Call the Talking Matters office for an initial consultation on Ph 8255 7137 and we will make a time for you to come in.



# What is dyslexia?

*Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that is thought to be based in the 'wiring' of the brain and is passed down in families. Children are often considered dyslexic if they are not fluent readers and spellers and yet appear to be of at least average intelligence and their reading and writing difficulties cannot be explained by other learning difficulties or disability. Children who have not been properly taught to read, cannot be considered dyslexic.*

Often children who are diagnosed as 'dyslexic' don't receive the speech pathology support that would be beneficial to them due to confusion about what dyslexia is.



## Key points about dyslexia

- The word “dyslexic” is used to describe children who are having difficulties learning to read.
- Dyslexia is most often a language based difficulty.
- Studies have shown from 5 to 10% of children have dyslexia.
- It interferes with understanding and learning to use language.
- Difficulties are experienced with processing sounds in words, with reading, spelling and writing.
- A person who is dyslexic has difficulty with learning to read and spell that is not caused by
  - ✦ Hearing or vision impairments
  - ✦ Lack of or ineffective reading instruction
  - ✦ A general intellectual deficit.

Researchers have found that a gene on chromosome #6 is involved. This gene is dominant which is why it runs in families.

## The assistance of a speech pathologist in assessing and working with dyslexic children is vital.

There is still much research needed in the area in order to gain clearer answers, but what we do know from the research is:

- Early intervention when children are experiencing difficulties with reading, spelling and writing, or have a family history of dyslexia is vital.
- Children need to have sound phonological awareness (hearing the sounds) before having phonics instruction (matching sounds to letter symbols).
- Children who are dyslexic require explicit phonological and phonemic awareness instruction, which is an area of speciality for speech pathologists.

## What should you do?

- If you have a family history of 'dyslexia' you can help your child to start right by developing their phonological awareness. Talk to your Talking Matters Speech Pathologist about the programs such as “Ready to Read” and “Succeeding with reading” available from our office. *Prevention is better than cure.*
- If your child is struggling with developing their reading, spelling or writing, seek professional support from your Talking Matters Speech Pathologist. Speech Pathologists are reading, spelling and writing experts.

# Information on support options





# FaHCSIA's Helping Children with Autism package.

*Children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, including Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, PDD-NOS, Rhett's Syndrome and Childhood Disintegrated Disorder prior to their sixth birthday are eligible for a funding package for therapy under the Government's Helping Children with Autism initiative.*



The package has a range of components to it which includes funding for Early Intervention Services. Early Intervention Services provide funding for eligible services to be provided for children aged zero to seven with an ASD. The funding supports delivery of multidisciplinary, evidence based, early intervention services.

The package provides \$12,000 in funding under the early intervention component to be used until the child's seventh birthday, with a maximum of \$6000 per financial year. The child needs to be seen by an Autism Advisor and deemed eligible for the program before their **sixth** birthday. The funding is paid to the service providers for services provided to eligible children.

Following a diagnosis of ASD families can contact an Autism Advisor in their state who will provide information about eligibility, available funding and the services that are available. Autism Association of South Australia provides the Autism Advisory services for South Australia and can be contacted on 1300 288 476 or (08) 8379 6976.

Eligible families can use their early intervention funding package from FaHCSIA to purchase services from Talking Matters by phoning (08) 8255 7137 for an appointment. All families having services under this program will begin with a 1 hour intake meeting to plan assessment and therapy needs so that an individual learning plan can be developed that meets the families needs. Following this appointment further assessment of your child's needs is usually undertaken so that an individualised learning program can be determined. Following this your child is provided with support and learning opportunities to help them develop the skills they need for success.

Most services are individual services provided in our Elizabeth East of Kapunda offices or within some schools, preschools and childcare settings. We are also able to provide small group programs at times when there are sufficient enrolments and need for group work. We are sometimes able to offer special arrangements for visits to other locations by negotiation.



## **Patients having services with Talking Matters benefit from:**

- Timely access to services, appointments can be booked straight away, there is no waiting list.
- Assistance to organise resources under the funding where these are required as part of the child's individual learning plan.
- Services available in a growing number of schools, including special schools in the area.
- A holistic approach to managing the child's needs. We will support the family to access services from other providers where this is needed and we have occupational therapy available on site.
- A professional and caring approach to supporting families
- 30 minute or 1 hour sessions available based on child's need
- Home or childcare centre services can be negotiated where required.
- An experienced and committed team of professionals with specific expertise in this area

# FaHCSIA's Better Start funding package.

*Children who are 6 years of age or under and who have been diagnosed with Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Fragile X syndrome or a moderate or greater vision or hearing impairment, including deafblindness may be eligible for the Australian Government's Better Start Initiative.*

From the 1st of July 2011 the Australian Government has put in place a new funding initiative for early intervention services for children with specific disabilities. Children with Cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, Fragile X syndrome and moderate or greater vision or hearing impairments will have **access to funding** for therapy by recognised providers. **Talking Matters** and members of their consortium have been **included on the Better Start Early Intervention Service Provider Panel** and will therefore be able to provide services to children under this package.

From July 1 2011, children who are aged under six years and have been diagnosed with one of the listed disabilities can be registered to access early intervention funding of **up to \$12,000** (up to a maximum of \$6,000 per financial year). Funding can be used for speech pathology, audiology, and occupational therapy through the Talking Matters consortium. Families will have until their child's seventh birthday to use the early intervention funding. Children must be registered however before their 6th birthday.

This targeted early intervention in the pre-school years aims to assist children to have the best possible preparation for the transition to school. The FaHCSIA website <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au> provides further information about this funding. Once at the FaHCSIA webpage look for the 'Better Start Initiative' tab on the right hand side of the page.

## How to register for the Better Start Initiative

Parents or carers of eligible children will need to register their child for Better Start before they turn six in order to access the early intervention funding. The Better Start Registration and Information Service (RIS) will be operated by Carers Australia from the 1st of July 2011. **To register your child for the Better Start initiative, call the Carers Australia RIS on 1800 242 636.**

To register for the Better Start initiative families will need to provide:

- the child's Centrelink Customer Reference Number (CRN)
- proof of the child's age and residential address, and
- **a written conclusive diagnosis.**

## Further information

For further information about the Better Start initiative, please visit the FaHCSIA website. Enquiries can also be directed to the **Better Start Helpline on 1800 989 530** or email to [Better.Start@fahcsia.gov.au](mailto:Better.Start@fahcsia.gov.au). For information about services with Talking Matters under this program please contact our office on ph (08) 8255 7137.



# Medicare rebates for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder

*Children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, including Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Rhett's Syndrome and Childhood Disintegrating Disorder may be eligible to claim Medicare rebates for some therapy sessions with speech pathologists, occupational therapist and psychologists.*



Rebates are available for children under the age of 13 years. Each child is entitled to 20 sessions in total, across all therapy areas. The total of 20 sessions is for the life of the child (not per year). Medicare rebates and private health fund rebates cannot both be claimed for the same session. Families should investigate which option is most beneficial.

## **To be eligible to claim the sessions from Medicare:**

- The child must be under the management of a paediatrician or child psychiatrist. If the child is not currently seeing a paediatrician or child psychiatrist they may benefit from a referral as they are unable to access these sessions unless referred by one of these professionals.
- The paediatrician or psychiatrist must agree the child has Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- If the paediatrician or psychiatrist agrees, they can prepare a care plan that includes speech pathology, occupational therapy or psychology services. They will then lodge a claim with Medicare that includes the appropriate item number, so Medicare knows that the child has Autism Spectrum Disorder and is eligible for the therapy rebates.
- The paediatrician should prepare a treatment plan for your child, which includes the appropriate therapy services. They can allocate up to 10 therapy sessions, per profession, at one time. There is no particular form that needs to be completed. The paediatrician can simply indicate the need for services in a letter to the appropriate service.
- Following the 10 therapy sessions, the speech pathologist will provide a written report to the child's paediatrician, who will consider whether to order a further series of sessions up to a total of 20, across all therapy areas.
- Families cannot claim rebates for sessions until the paediatrician has sent his claim to Medicare with the appropriate item number. Families can check to see whether their child is eligible and the item number has been lodged by calling Medicare on 132011.
- In order to claim for speech pathology services your speech pathologist must be registered with Medicare and be a practising member of Speech Pathology Australia as well as have experience in the area of working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. All speech pathologists at Talking Matters meet these criteria.

Parents can gain more information about this by contacting the Helping Children with Autism enquiry line on 1800 289 177, <http://www.health.gov.au/autism>, or by contacting Autism SA on 1300 288 476.

# Medicare rebates for children through the Better Start program for children with disabilities

*Children diagnosed with Down's Syndrome, Fragile X, Cerebral Palsy and moderate or greater hearing or vision loss may be eligible to claim Medicare rebates for some therapy sessions with speech pathologists, occupational therapist and psychologists.*



Rebates are available for children under the age of 13 years. Each child is entitled to 20 sessions in total, across all therapy areas. The total of 20 sessions is for the life of the child (not per year). Medicare rebates and private health fund rebates cannot both be claimed for the same session. Families should investigate which option is most beneficial.

To be eligible to claim the sessions from Medicare:

- The child must be under the management of a paediatrician or child psychiatrist. If the child is not currently seeing a paediatrician or child psychiatrist a referral to a paediatrician would be beneficial.
- The paediatrician or psychiatrist must agree that your child has an eligible diagnosis. If the diagnosis was carried out by another professional families should take copies of their diagnostic reports to your appointment.
- If the paediatrician or psychiatrist agrees, they can prepare a care plan that includes speech pathology, occupational therapy or psychology services. They will then lodge a claim with Medicare that includes the appropriate item number so Medicare knows that the child has an eligible disability and is eligible for the therapy rebates.
- The paediatrician should prepare a treatment plan for your child which includes the appropriate therapy services. They can allocate up to 10 therapy sessions, per profession, at one time. There is no particular form that needs to be completed. The paediatrician can simply indicate the need for services in a letter to the appropriate service.
- Following the 10 therapy sessions the speech pathologist will provide a written report to the paediatrician who will consider whether to order a further series of sessions up to a total of 20, across all therapy areas.
- Families cannot claim rebates for sessions until the paediatrician has sent his claim to Medicare with the appropriate item number. Families can check to see whether their child is eligible and the item number has been lodged by calling Medicare on 132011.
- In order to claim for speech pathology services the speech pathologist must be registered with Medicare and be a practising member of Speech Pathology Australia. They must also have experience in the area of working with children with the eligible disability. All speech pathologists at Talking Matters meet these criteria.





# Chronic Disease Allied Health Services

*This program was formerly known as the Enhanced Primary Care Plan. We welcome the opportunity to work with children who have a care plan in place that includes referral for speech or language input.*



Children with complex care needs may be eligible for up to 5 allied health services over a 12 month period. Services may be provided by a range of health professionals, however only 5 in total will attract the Medicare rebate. Additional information about the program is available from Medicare at this address

<http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/provider/incentives/allied-health.jsp>

Further information regarding this program and how it relates to speech pathology is provided by the speech pathology professional body, Speech Pathology Australia. This is the direct link for your convenience

[http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=437&Itemid=326](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=437&Itemid=326)

## Information for doctors:

- Written reports are provided following the first and last therapy session and at other times as indicated.
- Our admin team are well versed in the requirements for providing services under this plan and are available from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday to respond to questions on (08) 8255 7137.
- If you are unaware, the Northern Division of General Practice have provided a quick and easy to use template for the purpose of putting team care plans together.
- Referral forms are available online from the Medicare site. We have provided the link here [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-medicare-health\\_pro-gp-pdf-ahs-cnt.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-medicare-health_pro-gp-pdf-ahs-cnt.htm)
- ANDGP also provide a range of templates on their website to assist in this process <http://www.andgp.org.au/Default.aspx?tabid=72>

## Things patients need to know:

- Medicare provide a rebate for a portion of the cost of the sessions, they are NOT FREE. When used for a therapy session there is only a small out of pocket expense.
- We can process rebates at the time of the appointment enabling refunds to be paid into client accounts usually the day after the service.
- Unless a child has had a recent assessment completed by a speech pathologist, or is already in our care they are likely to need an assessment to be completed before therapy can commence. This is necessary to ensure therapy targets the appropriate skills for the individual. Out of pocket expenses for assessment are higher than for therapy due to the length of consultation provided.
- Patients can not claim through Medicare and your private health insurance for the same session. Some health funds may pay more than Medicare towards the cost of the sessions.
- Patients will not be able to claim back through Medicare until Medicare have a record of the plan existing. For this reason it is important that the GP bills the appropriate item numbers for writing the plan.
- Children need to meet criteria to be eligible, this is that they be **chronic** (condition present or expected to be present for more than 6 months) and **complex** (needing at least 2 additional professionals to be included on the plan written by the family doctor). Many children with speech or language delays experience co-morbid difficulties requiring input from a paediatrician, occupational therapist, audiologist, psychologist and sometimes a physiotherapist.



# Healthy Kids Check for 4 year olds

Under the Medicare Schedule effective the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2008, GP's are eligible to provide "Healthy Kids Checks" for children aged four years. MBS item 10986

The schedule states "The purpose of the Healthy Kids Check is to ensure that every four year old child in Australia has a basic health check to see if they are healthy, fit and ready to learn when they start school. The Healthy Kids Check will promote early detection of lifestyle risk factors, delayed development and illness, and introduce guidance for healthy lifestyles and early intervention strategies." (page 9).

The check will provide an opportunity to:

- issue parents/guardians with information and advice on healthy habits for life for children;
- link parents/guardians and children to the primary health care system;
- assist General Practitioners (GPs) and Practice Nurses to identify any health issues for children prior to starting school;
- enable GPs to provide treatment or referral for any conditions identified as a result of the check.



The schedule suggests that in assessing the child's development, parents/guardians should be encouraged to provide relevant information through questions. The example provided regarding hearing and speech is "Are you happy with the number of words your child uses and their understanding of directions?" (page 10)

You will be aware that not all parents are sure of what to expect of their children's development. We hope this package will make this easier, specifically the checklist for four year old children. Should families be concerned about their child's development and wish to have an assessment we have a number of brochures available on our website that we hope will be of assistance. We have general information about our services in our Talking Matters brochures. We also offer a "Ready to Read" group on Saturday mornings that targets early literacy skill development in children aged from 4 ½ years to 6 years of age. Brochures about this service are also available on our website.

*Early identification and assistance for children with speech or language learning difficulties is vital for children's social/emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes. Your assistance in getting children seen before the gap is too big will give children a fighting chance to 'catch up' and experience long term success. When left too long before being seen by a speech pathologist children face a life-long battle trying to 'catch up', and rarely experience 'keeping up'.*



A care plan template is provided by Adelaide Northern Division of General Practice on their webpage <http://www.andgp.org.au/Default.aspx?tabid=72>

More information available about this program is available here [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/Healthy\\_Kids\\_Check](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/Healthy_Kids_Check)

# What parents can do to help





## Learning to listen

*When a child begins to learn how to talk they must attend to the sounds in their environment. It is important for a child to develop good listening skills in order for them to listen to their environment and learn from it. By improving their ability to listen to these sounds, children will increase their learning and success in the classroom environment.*

### Activities to increase a child's listening abilities:

#### In the home or childcare setting:

- 1) **Play a listening game**, sit quietly in a room and take turns identifying sounds you can hear e.g. taps dripping, creaking doors or ticking clocks.
- 2) **Make a scrap book**, or cut out pictures you find in a magazine, stick them into your scrap book and talk about the noise they make. Try and make the noises as you paste them into your scrap book.
- 3) **Play with toys**, and make their noises as you play with them. Encourage the child to listen and imitate the noises. As the child improves at this, hide a toy behind your back and make its noise, see if your child can identify what toy you are hiding and have them imitate the sound.
- 4) For very young children, ensure you have **lots of auditory stimulus around them**, so plenty of toys which squeak, rattle or make noises will encourage listening skills.
- 5) **Listen to music or songs** with instructions and do the actions as you sing the song.

#### Other ideas:

- 1) Take your child to the zoo, and talk about the animal noises as you wander around. Talk about all the different noises and what animals make that noise.
- 2) Listen for unusual sounds in the environment and encourage your child to point the sounds out to you e.g. how a coffee machine sounds, or a squeaky wheel on a trolley.
- 3) Go for a walk through a park or reserve, talk about all the things you can hear e.g. birds, wind in the trees, planes or cars. Create a game and count how many things you can hear.



# Learning to listen (cont.)

## Music:

- 1) Use musical instruments to follow along to songs on the radio, or play a song from a CD. Ask your child to follow the sounds that they hear.
- 2) For very young children make sure you have toys that play music or songs to encourage listening.
- 3) Try karaoke, sing along to tapes and watch television programs that play children's songs.
- 4) Make your own musical instruments and play them e.g. fill glasses with different amounts of water and make up your own tunes.

## Listening to the difference between sounds:

Once your child is improving at identifying sounds in their environment, ask them to identify the differences in the sounds. Talk about the sounds being loud/quiet, high or low pitched.

- 1) As you walk around a shopping centre talk about the sounds you can hear, start introducing the concepts loud and quiet e.g. "can you hear the cars outside they sound quiet, but all these people's voices together sound loud".
- 2) Play a guessing game, ask your child to close their eyes while you make a sound and see if they can guess the sound. Once they have achieved this give them two sounds, and ask them to identify the sounds and what makes them different.
- 3) Create a 'sounds' book, have pages with 'loud' 'quiet' 'high' and 'low' written on them and get your child to cut out pictures and stick them on the right page e.g. a kettle could be stuck on a loud page.





# Top 10 tips for talking with babies and toddlers

*Babies are born pre-programmed to tune into the speech around them and to their parents voices specifically, so it is never too soon to start talking with your baby. Simple things you as a parent can do every day can make a real difference to your child's language skills and set them up for future learning success.*

1. **Talk together every day.** Talk to your child whenever you can, as you go about daily activities like cooking, bathing, dressing, feeding, nappy changes, getting ready for bed. Looking after babies and toddlers takes up a lot of time but this time can be used for learning and building relationships as you get the practical things done. It won't take any extra time and if your child is interested and engaged in what you do they will probably cooperate better too.

Make a special talking time each day where you just focus on talking with your child for a few uninterrupted minutes. Talk as you play, sing, say rhymes or look at a book.



2. **Get down to your child's level and communicate face to face.** Ensure your child can see your face when you are talking to them. This helps them focus, lets them see and hear your words better and encourages them to copy you. This might mean getting down on the floor, putting your child in your lap, cuddling up together on a couch or bed or sitting them up in a high chair at the table with you.
3. **Follow your child's lead when you talk.** Take some time to see what holds your child's interests. Watch what they look at, touch, hear and reach for and talk with them about these things. Put out a range of toys or books and see which ones they choose. Watch what they do and copy them and talk about what they are doing.
4. **Use simple clear speech when talking with your child.** There is no need to use "baby talk". It is better for your child to hear real words spoken correctly, but do keep your words simple and your sentences short in the beginning. Gradually make them longer as your child develops. Speaking sentences just one or two words longer than what your child can say is usually about right. This means mostly single words and short phrases for babies. If your child makes up their own words for things or says them in an unusual way, repeat the right word back to them now and then, so they hear the word the correct way and they will use it correctly when they are ready. Don't repeat your child's errors. When your child can talk, repeat and expand what they say to keep them developing their language skills.
5. **Use lots of repetition.** Young children learn through repetition. Repeat words, rhymes, actions, stories, games and songs. Play games where you can repeat a word or action over and over such as peek-a-boo, or stacking blocks "up, up, up, down".





## Top 10 tips for talking with babies and toddlers (cont.)

6. **Encourage imitation.** Babies and toddlers learn so much by copying. Copy your baby's sounds and actions and soon they will begin to copy you. Be surprised and delighted when they copy you and they will want to do it again and again. Repeat something they know a few times then try something new and see if they can copy that too.
7. **Offer choices as often as you can.** As adults we often make small decisions for children that they could make themselves which would allow them to learn and develop communication skills. Often these small things don't really matter, it just takes a little more time for your child to decide, but this is worth it to develop their skills. Only offer choices you are happy for your child to make though. Before your baby can talk they can make choices by pointing, reaching or even just looking at the one they want. Hold up two items, maybe a choice of two foods or two different toys to start with and see which one they show you they want. Tell them the name of the thing they choose and give it to them. They will learn the power of communicating successfully with others and be on their way to developing vital skills.
8. **Encourage turn taking.** Try to structure your play activities so you and your child take turns and are equally active. Once you have taken your turn, pause and wait with anticipation for your child to take another turn.

Show them using body language, that you expect a response. Silently count to five before saying or doing anything. You can also practise turn taking with simple, fun games such as peek-a boo, rolling a ball back and forth, taking turns to blowing bubbles or stack blocks.

9. **Introduce books as soon as possible.** Reading to your child is one of the best things you can do to help them learn. Make it a part of your day every day. Read new books but also repeat favourite ones over and over. Babies love simple books with bright colours, pictures of familiar things and friendly faces, textures to touch and surprise flaps to explore.
10. **Offer quality learning opportunities as much as possible.** Remember that you are your child's favourite and most educational plaything. A small amount of TV or DVD's are fine but not more than 2 hours per day is recommended for young children. Think about the quality of the programs and whether they are suitable for your child's age. Also think about the toys you give your child to play with. They should be safe, bright, colourful and age appropriate. Some inexpensive toys can be used in many ways, develop many skills and grow with your child; such as blocks, cars and trucks, dolls and animals, pretend toys such as tea sets. Sometimes expensive electronic items can only be used in a limited way and so children may tire of them quickly. Your child may have more fun and learn more doing something simple with you, such as playing with the pegs while you hang the washing rather than playing alone with an expensive gadget.

Raising babies and toddlers is hard work but it is a special time that passes quickly so remember to take the time to enjoy your child as they grow and develop.



# Top 10 things to do to help a child's speech

*If you are waiting for an assessment or therapy to begin, or if you just want to help your child's development every day, here are some simple things you can do that make a real difference to your child's speech skills. These are general ideas and are not a replacement for speech therapy support provided by a qualified speech pathologist. Speech pathologists are trained in choosing the correct sounds to work on and in developing your child's speech in the most effective manner.*

1. **Talk together every day.** The more speech your child hears the better their speech will be. Speak clearly and use the correct words for things. Don't repeat your child's errors. They may be cute but your child needs to hear the correct way of saying things to learn. Try to find some uninterrupted talking time when the TV and other noises and distractions are turned off and you just talk together.
2. **Look after your child's hearing.** Have a hearing test with a qualified audiologist if you are concerned about hearing or speech and always follow up on any ear infections. If your child has more than four ear infections in a year ask to see an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist.
3. **Get face to face with your child.** Ensure your child can see your face when you are talking to them. When you model tricky words or sounds make sure they can see as well as hear you. This helps them focus, lets them see and hear your words better and encourages them to copy you. This might mean getting down on the floor, putting your child in your lap, cuddling up together on a couch or bed or sitting them up in a high chair at the table with you.
4. **Play games with sounds.** During play, encourage sound play using speech sounds. Use real speech sounds rather than throaty, non-speech sounds. Try car games: car - putt, putt, down a ramp – weeeeeeeee, putting on brakes – eeeeeeeek, flat tyre - th, th, th, horn honking - beep, beep; farm animals: baa, moo, nay, woof; draw dots, lines and scribbles and make sounds as you go. Copy sounds that you hear around the house: doorbell – ding, microwave – beep etc.
5. **Be realistic.** Be aware of the ages children typically develop sounds and what sounds to expect from your child.

## Typical ages for sounds to develop are

3 years – m, n, h, p, w, d, g, y, k, f, b, t

4 years – sh, ch, j, l, s

5 years – r, v

6 years – z

8 years – th



## Top 10 things to do to help a child's speech (cont.)

**6. Listen to what your child says not just how they say it.** The main reason we speak is to communicate an idea. Make sure you listen to what your child is saying and respond to that. A child who feels listened to and heard will communicate more. Once your child feels listened to and understood try the following techniques to help fix any errors.

**7. Be positive.** Use lots of encouragement and tell your child what they have done well. Use specific words. "I like the way you used your words to ask for that". "I like the way you tried that new tricky word". "You tried to fix that /s/ sound, well done" "When you looked at me and spoke clearly I could understand just what you wanted". Encourage things such as eye contact, correct speed and volume of talking as these help speech be more easily understood.

**8. Recast your child's errors.** If your child makes a mistake when talking, repeat what they say, fixing the mistake to show them the right way. Use a positive tone and repeat it a few times but keep it natural. E.g. Child "I see a shish". Adult "Yes a **fish**, I see the **fish** too, a pretty **fish**". Try repeating this same word a few more times later on, so your child gets lots of chances to hear it the right way. Notice the sound your child finds difficult and repeat other words with that sound too, again being positive and natural. "look he's in the **fish** tank, eating **fish** food, see his **fins**, now he's swimming **fast**, how **funny**"

**9. Model new words with tricky sounds.** Look at books and play games that allow you to teach your child new words with sounds your child finds tricky. Alphabet books, games and puzzles are good. Look for books with a whole page of pictures that start with a certain sound, say them for your child and ask them to watch you as you say them. Look for stories with repeated lines that include a tricky sound such as "Where is the green sheep?" by Mem Fox for /sh/ or "red fish, blue fish" by Dr Suess for /f/. As your child is getting better at saying a new sound you could also try jokes and rhymes with that sound for extra practice.

**10. Practice tricky words.** If there are important words your child has difficulty with, such as names of family members or other important people, or things that they like to talk about often, give these some extra practice. Make a list of three to five only and put them on the fridge. Add a picture for each if your child can't read. Say each word clearly for your child and ask them to try and copy you. Try each word a couple of times per day and praise your child for trying and for getting clearer.



Also remember that children learn new sounds in stages, first in single sounds, then in words, then sentences and then in conversation last of all. Don't expect your child to remember to use a new sound all the time straight away.

# Top 10 things to develop your child's literacy (cont.)

*There are many things families can do at home to help their child be successful with literacy. You, as a parent, are the most important influence on your child's learning. Here are some things you can do to help your child's reading and writing skills develop. You can begin before your child starts school and continue on as your child develops their skills in literacy.*

**1. Read, Read, Read!** Make a habit of reading to your child every day. Reading to your child is the one thing that has the biggest impact on your child's ability to learn to read. When you start reading to your child at an early age, your child grows up with reading as an enjoyable part of their daily routine. Mem Fox, author and educator, believes that children need to hear 1000 books before they begin to read themselves. This is easy if you begin when your child is a baby, but much harder if you wait until they begin school.



**2. Re-read favourites.** Mem Fox suggests sharing three books with your child each day; a new one, one you have read before and an old favourite that your child has heard many, many times. Children learn through repetition. Hearing a story a number of times allows your child to understand the story, link the words to the pictures, understand the rhythm and flow of the words and predict what comes next. Prediction is a skill often used by fluent readers. Help your child learn to predict by giving them a chance to fill in words as you read familiar stories.

**3. Explore a range of texts.** Stories are great but there are lots of other things to explore too, such as magazines, letters, postcards, menus, newspapers, newsletters, advertisements, signs, catalogues, notes, shopping lists, birthday and Christmas cards, recipes, diaries, instructions, maps and even bills. Share all these different reading and writing experiences with your child and talk about them together.

**4. Talk, talk, talk!** Reading and writing are language skills therefore strong language skills mean it is easier to develop literacy. Talk to your child as much as you can in your daily activities together. Vocabulary (the number of words your child understands and uses) is particularly important. The biggest difference between good and poor readers is the size of their vocabulary. See information on developing vocabulary in the articles section of our website for ideas on developing vocabulary.



**5. Talk about books.** Help your child learn about how books work. Talk about the cover, how to hold the book and turn the pages, the title and how it gives clues to what is inside. Talk about the pictures and how the words tell about the pictures. Show how you start a book on the first page and work towards the end and how you start a page and read top to bottom and left to right. Look at lots of different books. Try making your own books. Help your child to feel confident around books.



# Top 10 things to develop your child's literacy

**6. Talk about sounds.** Talk about the sounds your child hears as a part of their life. Sing songs, tell rhymes and listen to music and stories on CD. Talk about the sounds in words. Clap out syllables and count them, talk about long words and short words. Read rhyming stories and talk about how rhyming words sound the same. Have fun making up your own rhymes. Talk about the sounds in your child's name. Talk about beginning and ending sounds in words and match things with the same sounds. Break up words into separate sounds. Play I spy.

**7. Talk about words and letters.** Look at words everywhere and talk about them. Count the letters in words and talk about long and short words. Talk about the sounds that letters make. Look at alphabet books and help your child to understand the name and the sound of the letter such as "B" is called "bee" and it makes a "buh" sound. Cut letters out of magazines and paste them. Make your own alphabet book. Find the letter your child's name starts with any where you can. Look at common words and see if you can find them on the pages of a book. Show your child that a word such as "the" has the same letters each time you find it and look for it in different places.



**8. Talk about stories.** Talk about how stories have a beginning and ending and how people in stories often have a problem to solve. Talk about the way that, in stories, we need to tell who is talking by using something like "he said". Talk about how the end of a story often has feeling words. Retell stories from pictures. Make up your own stories.

**9. Talk about what you read.** When you read together, talk to your child about what you read to develop their comprehension. Talk about what is happening, what you think about the characters, how they are feeling, what they might think, what they might do, what you would do and what might happen next.



**10. Make reading and writing a part of your family life.** Let your child see you read and write in lots of different ways. Involve them in activities such as opening the mail, writing letters, cards, and lists. Make sure your child has lots of chances throughout the day to use books, pencils, paper, drawing and writing materials. Join your local library and visit as a family. Show interest and pleasure in your child's attempts to read and write and put their writing and drawings on display.

\* Look at our "Starting School" pack for great ideas and activities, available on the Talking Matters website.



## About Talking Matters

Talking Matters is a private speech pathology clinic in Elizabeth East, which is in Adelaide's northern suburbs. Our team of speech pathologists work alongside occupational therapists, psychologists, speech assistants and tutors to support children to develop their speech, language, learning and literacy skills. There are a wide range of services on offer to give families choices about the types of program that will work for their children.



If you would like more information our website has lots of free fun ideas and resources. Our team welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues from other medical and educational backgrounds. To organise an appointment with one of our team members simply call 8255 7137.

## Services available to families:

- Individualised assessment and therapy
- Range of programs to suit family's budgets
- Educational software your child will want to use
- Fun activities to support home practice
- Continuity from toddlerhood through schooling
- Practical professional training sessions for educators
- Access to useful information and activities for educators, health professionals and families



**Talking Matters**  
Speech Pathology  
**[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)**  
**Ph 8255 7137**

