

# I CAN Factsheet B

## SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES: Getting the most of speech and language therapy: help in the early years



This factsheet is aimed at helping parents of pre-school children who may have speech & language difficulties. It details how and when to seek help, describes the role of a speech and language therapist (SLT) and what you might expect when you visit an SLT and after the appointment.

### How to seek help:

If you are worried about any aspect or stage of your child's speech and language development, do not ignore it. Share your concerns with, your health visitor and the staff at any toddler group, playgroup or nursery your child attends. These people may be able to reassure you, however if they echo your concerns you should contact your G.P., health visitor or local speech and language therapy service. I CAN runs a website, Talking Point, for parents and professionals and provides a wealth of information on speech, language and communication needs. There is also a facility for finding a speech and language therapist and other services in your area called Talking Links see [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk).

### When to seek help:

Speech and language therapists can see children as soon as a problem is suspected; babies and toddlers are never too young for a communication skills assessment. In fact, youngsters known to be at high risk of developing a speech or language difficulty, such as babies with cleft palate, hearing impairment, or a developmental disability like Downs Syndrome, may be seen by a speech and language therapist from the first few months of life.

### The right time to seek advice about your child is when you, as a parent are concerned:

Advice from a speech and language therapist in the early years can reduce the impact of any difficulties before your child starts school. Getting help at the right time may also prevent other difficulties, such as excessive temper tantrums or problems relating to other children, which can develop when children can't understand other people or get their message across.

### What is a speech and language therapist?

Speech and language therapists are professionals who work with people who have any sort of communication or swallowing difficulty. They study at university for up to four years in order to qualify. They usually work towards a Bachelor of Science or Arts in speech, language and communication science. They are usually members of The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and must be registered with the Health Professions Council in order to practice. Therapists must uphold a code of conduct and keep certain standards to be registered.



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### Where do speech and language therapists work?

The majority of speech and language therapists work for the National Health Service, based in hospitals and community health clinics. Their work with children may also take them into nurseries, schools and children's homes. There is no charge to be seen by an NHS speech and language therapist. Other speech and language therapists are employed directly by schools and education authorities, or within the voluntary sector. Some may work, individually or as part of groups, in private practices. A therapist in independent practice will charge fees for their work.

### What to expect at a speech and language therapy appointment

#### Before you go:

First appointments for pre-school children to see speech and language therapists are usually in community clinics or hospital departments. You don't need to do anything to prepare for the appointment, although if you have any questions you want to ask the therapist in advance you can of course contact him or her. If English is not your child's first language, or the language used most at home, it will be helpful for the therapist to know this in advance. It may be possible for an interpreter to be present.

On the day of the appointment talk to your child about where you are going. It's not a good idea to tell children that they must talk as this often makes them unwilling to say anything at all!

Remember to take with you to the appointment, your child's health record book, any glasses or a hearing aid your child uses. Write down any questions you want to ask so that you don't forget them!

### The first visit to the speech and language therapist:

In order to get to know your child and find out if he or she has a speech and language difficulty, the speech and language therapist is likely to spend your first appointment playing with your child and asking you questions. Nobody knows your child as well as you do, the information you give about how your child is developing, and how he or she behaves at home is very important.



The first, or a later visit may also include one or more "formal assessments", this involves the therapist showing your child a selection of toys or pictures, asking some set questions and recording the responses.

The 'assessment' of your child and his or her problem (if there is one) is vital as there are many different types of therapy for different problems.

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### What happens next:

After the assessment, which may take one or more appointments, the speech and language therapist will tell you what he or she recommends for your child. This could be:

- A referral to another specialist, because the therapist needs some further information about your child, such as a hearing assessment, before making a decision.
- An appointment in a few months to check progress. There may be some activities for you to carry out with your child at home in the meantime.
- Regular speech and language therapy, individually, or with a group of other children with similar problems. Regular therapy can be weekly, but it may be less or more often.
- Therapy or advice given at your child's nursery or playgroup.
- Nothing! - If the therapist thinks your child has no problem.

What the therapist decides will depend on their assessment of what your child needs.

### How can I help my child benefit as much as possible from speech and language therapy?

- Turn up to your appointments! Or cancel them with as much notice as possible.
- Take an active interest in the sessions, ask questions and check with the speech and language therapist when you are unsure of anything.
- Do as much home practice as is recommended - speech, language and communication skills can be difficult to change even with regular individual therapy.

### If your child is at nursery:

- Keep your child's nursery or playgroup informed and encourage the speech and language therapist and nursery staff to liaise with each other if there is no contact already.
- Offer to be a "go-between" linking the speech and language therapist and the teacher.
- Ask if the teacher could attend any of your child's speech and language therapy appointments.

### What should I do if there is a long waiting list to be seen at the speech and language therapy clinic?

- Check whether the speech and language therapy service offers any parent information or training sessions.
- Ask the speech and language therapist if there is anything else you can be doing at home to help your child like additional 'home programmes'.
- You might consider seeing a speech and language therapist in independent practice, although this will cost money. Lists of qualified independent therapists are available from the Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice (ASLTIP), Tel 0870 241 3357, [www.helpwithtalking.com](http://www.helpwithtalking.com)
- Contact Afasic for advice on 08453 55 55 77.

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### What should I do if I think my child needs more and/or regular therapy?

Always discuss your concerns with the speech and language therapist. Consistent talking to and playing with your child, as advised by the speech and language therapist will support frequent or regular appointments.

There may be additional support available locally, particularly if your child has severe or complex needs.

Such support schemes may include specialist nurseries, opportunity groups or home learning schemes ("Portage" for example), as well as a parent partnership service offering advice and support to parents of children with special needs. You can find out about these services from your local authority and local social services department.

### For further information about speech and language therapy, contact:

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists  
2 White Hart Yard  
London SE1 1NX  
Tel: 020 7378 3012  
Email: [info@rcslt.org](mailto:info@rcslt.org)

### I CAN:

I CAN is the children's communication charity. Communication is the essential 21st century life skill – the foundation on which children learn, achieve and make friends. I CAN works to develop speech, language and communication skills for all children. I CAN's particular focus is children who find communication hard.

Visit [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk) for further information on I CAN's work and to register for I CAN's monthly newsletter.

### For further support visit:

#### **Talking Point**

The first stop for information on children's communication. Visit [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk) to access essential information on supporting children at home and within the early years setting.

### Further reading:

#### **I CAN Factsheets:**

You may also find these I CAN Factsheets helpful:

#### **For professionals:**

- **Factsheet 1**  
Language Difficulties in the Early Years
- **Factsheet 4**  
Pupils with Speech Dyspraxia
- **Factsheet 5**  
Pupils with Asperger Syndrome

#### **For parents:**

- **Factsheet A**  
Speech and Language Difficulties - help in the early years

#### **Further support:**

- **Factsheet C**  
Useful Contacts
- **Factsheet D**  
Useful Reading