

Speech and Language Therapy – Supporting children with language delay

- **What is language delay?**

Children with a language delay acquire language normally but at a slower rate than other children their age. Therefore they will not be meeting the language development milestones for their age.

A child who has a language delay may have difficulties understanding language and/or difficulty speaking. Some of the difficulties a child with a language delay may have include: following instructions, putting words together, inferring meaning.

There are many possible causes for language delay and in some cases we can never be certain of the cause.

- **How can Speech and Language Therapy help?**

If you suspect that your child may have a language delay, it is important to seek advice from a Speech and Language Therapist as soon as possible. Without intervention, a language delay will begin to impact a child's educational progress and their social development.

The therapist will be able to provide the family and nursery/school with advice and strategies to support and develop the child's language skills. The therapist may also implement a language therapy programme.

Dependent on the severity of the language delay, with the specialist input of a Speech and Language Therapist and the commitment of the family to therapy, a language delay can resolve over time.

- **What is involved in the assessment?**

To begin with, the Speech and Language Therapist will take a case history. A case history is a number of questions, including questions about the milestones that your child has and

has not met. Sometimes, parents may not know all of the answers to the questions and this is fine, the Therapist will provide support as required when answering these.

The Therapist may also ask your permission to speak to the child's school teachers and support staff to gain further information on the child's language skills and difficulties.

The Therapist will wish to know about the things that motivate the child, as well as the things that do not, as this may help to engage the child in the assessment.

The assessment will aim to establish the child's language strengths and difficulties compared to the language development milestones for children of their age. The assessment will take place informally through play activities and formally through assessment books if the child is happy to do so. The Therapist may also wish to observe the child.

During the assessment, the Therapist will be able to rule out whether there are any other speech and language difficulties present.

A face to face assessment with the child and the family usually takes two hours but this is dependent on the areas that the therapist wishes to assess and on how engaged the child is with the assessment. The therapist may also need to gather further information from school which will take additional time as part of the assessment process. Children usually enjoy the activities that they do with our Therapists but they will not be pressured to engage with the activities if they do not wish to do so.

- **What might happen in therapy?**

The Therapist may provide the family/school with a list of strategies to help the child to understand language and to express themselves, these may include visual strategies.

The Therapist may recommend a 1:1 Speech and Language Therapy Programme for the Therapist to complete with the child. The Therapist would show the parents how they can continue to practise the programme at home.

The Therapist may recommend a Speech and Language Therapy programme for the parents/school to follow. The Therapist would model all aspects of the programme to the parents/school and would be able to provide support as necessary.

Therapy may focus on a variety of aspects of language, some aspects may include: increasing the child's vocabulary, helping them to construct sentences, and increasing their understanding of instructions,

These are just a few of the interventions that may be suggested, the Therapist will need to analyse the assessment findings in order to recommend the type of therapy that is most suitable.