

COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

Problems with Hearing & Speech Development

The first five years of a child's life are critical in the development of hearing and speech. During these early years, many children spend the majority of their time in the company of professionals, such as yourselves, who are trained specifically in the care of preschool children.

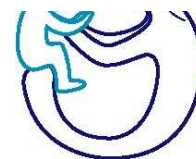
In light of the time spent with these children, your opinion of a child's hearing and speech development is valuable and essential. Should you question the hearing and/or speech development of a child in your care, please consult the following Hearing and Speech Checklist. The checklist outlines normal hearing and speech behaviour for children at various stages of their development, i.e., birth through five years of age. Therefore, the checklist can help you decide if a child is performing at an age-appropriate level.

After reviewing the checklist, if you still have a concern regarding a child, it is important for you to discuss this concern with the child's parent(s). Parents often rely on and appreciate the opinion of other caregivers regarding their children. Inquire whether the child is exhibiting the same behaviour(s) in the home environment and whether the parent is concerned as well.

As you are in a position to take an active role in the early identification of possible hearing and/or speech problems, it is imperative for you to express your concern to the child's parent(s). All too often, problems with a child's hearing and/or speech are neglected until after entry into school. Unfortunately, the child who enters school with a communication disorder has a higher risk of experiencing difficulties in educational, social, psychological and emotional areas.

Detection of hearing and/or speech problems can minimize future complications. Early identification and intervention is the key!

For further information regarding the hearing and speech of preschool children, please consult the brochures enclosed with this section.



PRESCHOOL COMMUNICATION SERVICES

Referral and Intake Process

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit is the central intake agency for Preschool Communication Services (PCS). As the central intake agency, the Health Unit is responsible for assessing all children referred to us for possible speech and language concerns. At the time of assessment, the speech-language pathologist, together with the family, decides the best intervention model for the child.

Attached is a copy of the **Referral and Intake Process** to explain how families go from initial referral to an intervention model within PCS. Referrals are accepted from any source with parent consent. There are many different intervention options, with weekly therapy being only one of them. Weekly therapy is offered in the form of individual therapy or group therapy at any one of the 4 PCS agencies (Thunder Bay District Health Unit; George Jeffrey Children's Centre; Children's Centre Thunder Bay; and St. Joseph's Care Group). Children may also receive therapy with a speech-language pathologist and communicative disorders assistant in their child care program. All children in participating child care programs can benefit from the emergent literacy initiative offered through PCS.

While a child is with Preschool Communication Services, the parent will be the main therapist with ongoing guidance from a speech-language pathologist. The type and amount of guidance will change as the child's needs change.