

H: Parent Stories

A Mother asks, "Will our son ever talk?"

By Genette Brest

Our son, Vincent, was about four years old when we took him to see our family doctor. We were concerned about Vincent not talking. Family and friends were always asking if Vincent was talking. We replied, "No, not yet.". It always puzzled us why it was so important to other people if Vincent was talking or not. He never said too much at the age most kids were supposed to talk. Our oldest son had a limited vocabulary at that age as well. However, our daughter was talking at an early age and she hasn't stopped! We thought Vincent was developing in a similar manner to his older brother, and therefore we were not overly concerned in the beginning; however, as the school year approached and Vincent was still not talking, the need for intervention became apparent.

Our family doctor made a referral to a paediatrician, who felt that perhaps Vincent was not hearing properly, and sent us to have Vincent's hearing tested at the local hospital. Waiting for the test seemed like an eternity. Our minds were racing. What did the future hold for our son? In the midst of our confusion and unanswered questions we were sent to see a developmental paediatrician. We didn't know that there were two different kinds of paediatricians. The appointment was made, and several questionnaires followed along, with renewed hope.

Finally, our appointment day arrived, and we were eagerly anticipating some answers. You can't imagine our disappointment when this doctor could not provide us with any answers. However, he did say that we would have to build a bridge so that Vincent could communicate with his family. We left his office more confused than we came in. We didn't talk on the way home. We didn't know what to say any more.

We thought that our youngest child was never going to talk. I thought to myself "how in the hell is my third child going to get along in the world without being able to talk". For days my husband and I were in a daze. We didn't know how to tell other family members and friends that Vincent may not ever talk. A few weeks later we saw the paediatrician again, and he told us that the best way to communicate with Vincent, was going to be with our hands. He told us that our family would all have to learn sign language. What a great idea! I couldn't wait to learn. Through the process of signing Vincent would be able to talk to us with his hands. He was already doing some of his own signing; for instance, if he wanted a drink or something to eat, he would put his hands to his mouth. He also used pointing to enhance his communication.

In a way, Vincent knew before we did that signing was the bridge. The paediatrician was surprised at how well we took the news and of our enthusiasm to learn sign language. He told us that other parents took months before they decided to learn signing. We had already been through the stages of helplessness, disbelief and denial, now it was time to put all our efforts into helping Vincent. Vincent and I enrolled in a signing class. I couldn't believe how much fun

I had taking the course. Not only did I learn a lot about signing, but perhaps even more importantly, I learned that Vincent needed to be treated like a normal child.

We started off with simple signs like 'mom' and 'dad'. When he was doing the signs on his own, we would teach him another one. When a new sign was difficult, Vincent would give us his hands. Vincent was picking up the signs really fast. After only four months Vincent was signing up to 65 words! Vincent wanted to "talk" and that's why I think he was learning so fast. We also noticed that Vincent wasn't as frustrated as he was before - because we knew what he wanted!

Vincent's progress has continued to amaze us. Initially, some people thought if Vincent learned to sign that he wouldn't learn to talk. They're wrong! Prior to his learning of sign, Vincent never said any words, but made a lot of sounds, such as an airplane flying or cars crashing into each other. Vincent soon started to say many of the words he was signing, like "bro" for broken and "pa" for pop and "da" for daddy!

Vincent is now five years old and has a vocabulary of approximately 50 words. With each new word comes a celebration. No one knows for sure what the future holds for Vincent. The doctors are amazed at the progress he has made in such a short time. They think the reason Vincent is doing so well is our attitude. Our ultimate goal is for our son to talk fluently. It doesn't matter how we get there or how long it takes. We know the path to success is a long and bumpy one, but we will always be there for our son.