

Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders



C: Speech and Language Services

What happens during a speech-language assessment – it can be like child's play!

By Susan Strachan, Parent

You have trusted your instincts. You have concerns about your child's speech, language, and communication development and you have contacted a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP). What happens now? Knowing what to expect, and how to support your child, can help you feel more confident about participating in the process.

The Assessment is a collaborative and flexible process that is adjusted to the needs of each child and family. Its purpose is to understand your child's current abilities, whether they are developing appropriately and if they have any need for therapy. After the assessment the SLP will determine if a therapy plan should be developed and, with the parent, determine how it will unfold.

Initially you will be asked to participate in a collection of preliminary background information, including what led you to contact the SLP. This may be done over the phone or in person. Previous assessment reports often provide valuable information but are not necessary to have.

The assessment session may be broken into two parts - one with and one without your child. Without your child the SLP will review case history including basic information and your concerns. Your observations are an important part of the information gathering process, be prepared to share them. In addition, the SLP might ask you to supplement observations by completing questionnaires.

It is necessary for the SLP to see your child in order to complete an assessment. The assessment for young children is usually done through observation during play and conversation. Choosing how to introduce your child to the SLP should be done in a manner that gives the child the most comfort - especially if there is a history of reluctance to meeting and interacting with a stranger. Consider treating the appointment as a 'play date.' Be prepared to sit on the floor with your child and the SLP to play with a selection of toys that are provided. The SLP, when necessary, will guide the play so that the child's abilities can be evaluated.

Older children will be involved in the assessment process more directly: they will contribute to the background information and participate in assessment tasks that can range from informal to formal standardized tests.

Occasionally an oral exam is required to verify that the oral structures (tongue, teeth, lips, palate) are intact and able to adequately perform the movements required for speaking. This is especially relevant when the primary concern is pronunciation. The SLP uses gloves, a tongue depressor and pinpoint lighting to look into your child's mouth. If your child has any fears regarding gloves or tongue depressors, it is a good idea to let the SLP know ahead of time.

Assessment can take one or more sessions. At the end of each session the SLP may be able to share some initial impressions or findings – often confirming parental instincts, and sometimes adding new information. A further session devoted to discussing findings allows the SLP to more fully explain any findings of typical or delayed development. A therapy plan that includes goals and recommended

approaches would be included in the discussion. The SLP may make suggestions for you to begin following at home.

It is important to remember that assessment is an ongoing process. As the SLP works with you and your child, and as your child continues to develop during the speech therapy process, new information will become available which could affect therapy goals and procedures.

When a parent is concerned about the development of a child the unknown can be very uncomfortable. An assessment by an SLP can change the unknown to the known. Take comfort in any solutions, and above all enjoy – it can be like child's play!