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May is Better Hearing and Speech Month Communication Takes Care

From the desk of

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The year is 2017, the month is May and it is time for our yearly newsletter to celebrate May is Better Hearing and Speech Month. Every day we are bombarded with new information. It is difficult to figure out what is correct and what is not, in an effort to improve communication and swallowing. My guiding principle is to look at the most recent research and keep adjusting the current practice in accordance with the newest findings. Take technology for instance. We were overjoyed and overwhelmed with technology. We have started using iPads and iPhones in our therapy. This is all good. However, experts are saying that too much use of technology is not good. Speech and language development is dependent on adequate time for verbal exchange such as listening, talking, reading, and interacting with parents – interaction that technology cannot duplicate. Constant loud noise of technology can cause hearing loss. We encourage families to set limits on use of technology and emphasize human communication interaction, in other words, talking and listening.

Talking with a Child Who Stutters

By Daniel DeJoy, Ph. D.

The way parents communicate with their child is very important. Most parents talk with youngsters in a way that helps them to pay attention, understand what is said, and use what they have heard. Parents can give extra help to a child who stutters. The child who has difficulty learning to talk needs more patience and encouragement.

What is stuttering?

Some children have difficulty combining sounds into words. They repeat or prolong the beginning sounds of many words. These repetitions and prolongations are called disfluencies, because they break up the smooth flow of speech. Disfluencies may be accompanied by tightness in the speech muscles, changes in pitch or loudness of the voice, or a look of fear. Frequent occurrence of these stressful types of disfluencies is called “stuttering.”

Why does stuttering develop?

Some authorities believe that stuttering develops when children try to avoid disfluencies that listeners have criticized or tried to correct. Also, it has been suggested that stuttering may develop when a child feels pressure to talk faster, respond more quickly, or speak more perfectly.

But pressure does not have to come from the listener. Some children are very sensitive and “put pressure on themselves.” These youngsters can be quite disfluent despite a pressure-free listening environment. Also, some children have immature speech and language skills. Almost any interaction strains their speaking abilities. It is quite possible that a combination of reasons, some coming from the child and some from the listening environment, influence the patterns of a child’s disfluencies.

How can parents reduce pressure on their child?

Is your child rushing to keep up with your speaking rate? Do you think and speak very quickly? Your young child may have trouble keeping up. The child may feel rushed to take a turn in conversation, for fear of being “left out.” If so, the child may seem in a hurry all the time. You can help the child who stutters to develop a “leisurely” attitude toward talking. The goal is for the child to view talking as easy rather than difficult. It is often helpful for parents to model speech that is slower in rate and easy in movement. A trained speech clinician can help parents learn this new way of talking with their child. The child who has “copied” a faster speaking rate may then in time, begin to imitate a new model of slow, easy speech.

How can parents help their child in conversation?

- ◆ Pause to give your child a little “breathing room” after the child finishes a sentence.
- ◆ Allow your child to finish words and sentences without interruption.
- ◆ Set up family rules for turn-taking at meals and other family gatherings.
- ◆ Set aside a special time each day to be alone with your child.
- ◆ Avoid criticisms such as “Stop that!,” “Take your time,” or “Think about what you want to say first.”
- ◆ Work closely with the clinician.
- ◆ Avoid situations where your child feels pressured.
- ◆ Spend more time in situations where your child tends to be fluent.



Mindfulness

We at The Speech Clinic are utilizing some of the techniques of mindfulness to promote more relaxed, calm, and productive sessions.

Mindfulness means being in the moment.

Asking children to pay attention to how they feel, what they are thinking, and how their body feels in that moment, for example, think about their breath. Mindfulness activities can be beneficial for patients with Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and anxiety and even for adults. These activities can help our patients focus better.

Some examples of mindfulness activities are:

- ◆ Mindful breathing, for example, inhale/exhale through the nose with hands on belly.
- ◆ Bubbles
- ◆ Pinwheels
- ◆ Mindful walking to the room
- ◆ Mindful seeing, for example, glitter jars, snow globes, fish tank
- ◆ Mindful listening, for example, bell and water sounds
- ◆ Stretching
- ◆ Progressive muscle relaxation
- ◆ Blowing activities
- ◆ Counting the breath