

# Speech and Spoken Language

Your family has chosen the spoken language approach for your child with hearing loss. Professionals are always talking about the terms speech and language. Aren't they the same? Not exactly. Although they are closely related, speech and language are different from one another. Parents who know the differences in those terms can recognize what a therapist or teacher might be emphasizing. If parents are aware of the components of speech and language, they can describe in greater detail what their children have achieved and find challenging. The whole family can learn what is involved in both speech and language and encourage the child's progress.

Listening skills form the basis for spoken language development. For a child with hearing loss, wearing a listening device (hearing aid or cochlear implant) can contribute to developing speech and spoken language. By wearing a device during all their waking hours, children are given multiple opportunities to learn to listen.

**Speech** is the verbal means of communicating. Speech consists of sounds (phonemes) specific to each language. There are components of speech which enhance the meaning of messages. Speech involves:

**Articulation:** the production of sounds for communication

- When your child begins developing speech skills, he will make reflexive sounds, such as crying or cooing. Babies begin to babble for their own enjoyment and later to gain a listeners' attention. With experience in listening children start to use vowels, consonants, jargon and combinations of sounds that seem like words and sentences. Eventually speech sounds become words as a child develops spoken language.

**Voice:** the skills of breath control, voice quality, pitch, and intensity

- Speaking long strings of words using one sustained breath requires breath control for a natural sounding voice. Other aspects such as pitch (high vs. low tones), voice quality (hoarseness, straining, nasality), and intensity (soft or loud) contribute to clear speech.



**Fluency:** the flow, or ease, of one's speech

- Speaking smoothly requires experience using varied sounds. When his skill and confidence grow, a child's speech becomes more fluent.

Listen to your child's speech. Make a detailed list of:

- Vowels, consonants and their combinations your child is using
- Your concerns about your child's voice tone, quality, intensity or fluency
- Questions you have for the audiologist, teacher, speech therapist or LSLS/AVT\*

**Language** is a socially shared system for representing thoughts and ideas. The terms receptive and expressive language refer to what your child understands and says. Every language is unique, complex, and has specific components. The rules for producing and understanding sentences in specific spoken languages are learned early from extensive listening experience. The components of spoken language include:

**Form:** connecting and sequencing symbols or sounds

- Order and combination of words to form sentences (syntax)
  - » Using complete sentences with children allows them to hear the structures and word order used in language. "Let's put your red sock on this foot now" provides more language model than simply saying "socks."

- Organization of the smaller units of words (morphology)
  - » Teaching your child different ways to use words helps build vocabulary. Words can be changed by adding morphemes (the smallest unit of meaning): happy can become happier, happiest, or unhappy.
- Sounds and sound patterns (phonology)
  - » Combining sounds to form words adds to your child's listening; /d/, /o/ and /g/ = dog. Children will babble at the beginning stages of language development, then imitate what they hear and later put different sounds together so "puh" becomes "puppy".



**Content:** the meaning of what is said

- Meaning of words and word combinations (semantics)
  - » Creating situations for the use of meaningful language helps develop a child's receptive and expressive vocabulary. Children will first use words from their routines: "shoes", "kitty" and "mommy" and later talk about what might happen if the lion gets loose from the zoo. Language develops from the concrete to the abstract as a child's cognitive development proceeds.

**Use:** the ability to apply language appropriately to a variety of situations

- Social aspects of language that vary depending on the context (pragmatics)
  - » Conveying words in a certain manner can be more meaningful than the actual terms used. Through body language, facial expression, and even humor a child can show he recognizes situational changes. A child might smile saying "please come inside our house" to a visitor and simply say "go in" to a sibling.

Listen to your child's language. List specific examples of:

- Words, phrases and sentences your child is saying
- Your questions about your child's understanding and use of words (pragmatics)
- Daily routines when you can converse with your child to encourage language

When a parent reads a story about a bus ride, this is language. When vocalizations are used in the story to invent bus noises, this can be speech work done meaningfully. When a parent and child discuss the bus and the noises it makes, this can combine speech and language learning. In spoken language development, the goal is for the child to develop strong language skills and clear speech. Create opportunities for your child to use spoken language in meaningful ways. Talk, sing, enjoy conversations and have fun all day long.