



SPRING 2009

HALDIMAND-NORFOLK HEALTH UNIT

COMMUNICATION MATTERS

A NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS, EARLY LEARNING PROVIDERS AND CAREGIVERS OF PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN.

What happens during speech therapy?

In our last issue, we introduced you to the variety of therapy types offered by our team. We started with Individual Intervention, when you join your child for a private session with one of our team members. In this issue, we'll tell you about another intervention type: Home Programming.

Home Programming means that your child's Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) has designed a specific, individualized program for you to carry out with your child at home.

The SLP or our CDA (Communicative Disorders Assistant) will go over the program with you and show you how to do it at home. Goals are chosen based on your child's assessment or re-assessment by the SLP.

Our program relies on parent input in all aspects of intervention, from the first assessment to the final discharge report! As a parent, you're the first and most important communication partner for your child. Home programming emphasizes and supports that role. It's usually the first intervention given when a child comes onto the program caseload.



Some parents feel a little taken aback by the home programming approach. "I'm not a trained speech pathologist; how can I help my child?" But home programming doesn't require you to have any special training other than the techniques your SLP will outline. Home programs are designed to be fun, not

stressful for either you or your child.

Home Programs may be recommended for a child who is having difficulty understanding or using language or a child who is having difficulty pronouncing speech sounds.

LANGUAGE home programs may address a child's ability to:

- Understand things that are said to him.
- Use an age-appropriate number and variety of words.
- Put sentences together in an age-appropriate way.
- Use the correct form of words (e.g., use plurals, pronouns, verb forms) in an age-appropriate way.

SPEECH home programs may address a child's ability to:

- Use specific sounds in an age-appropriate way.
- Be understood by others when he talks.

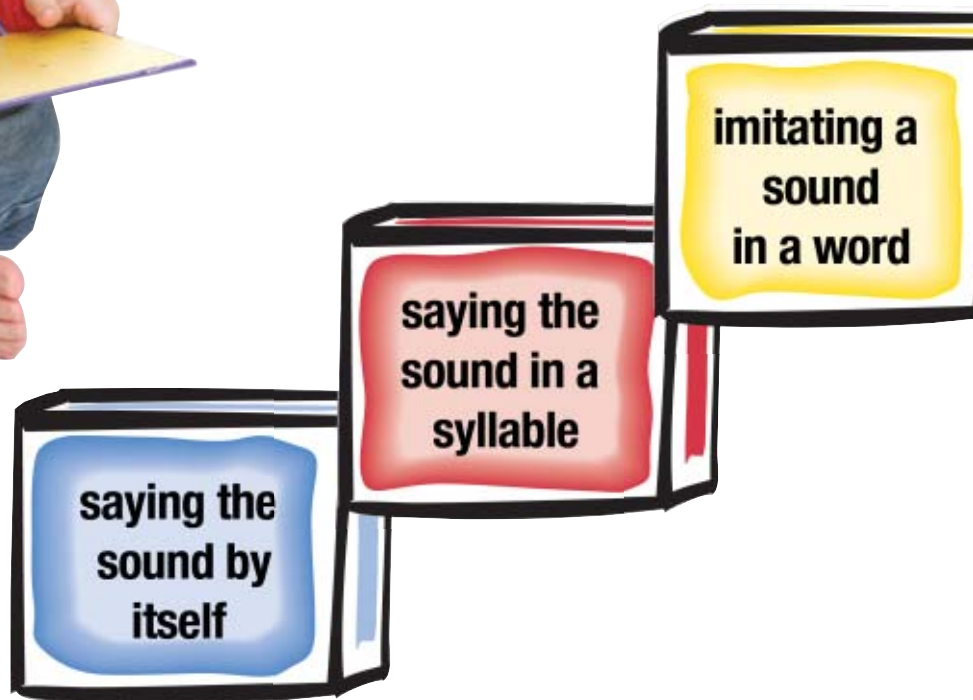
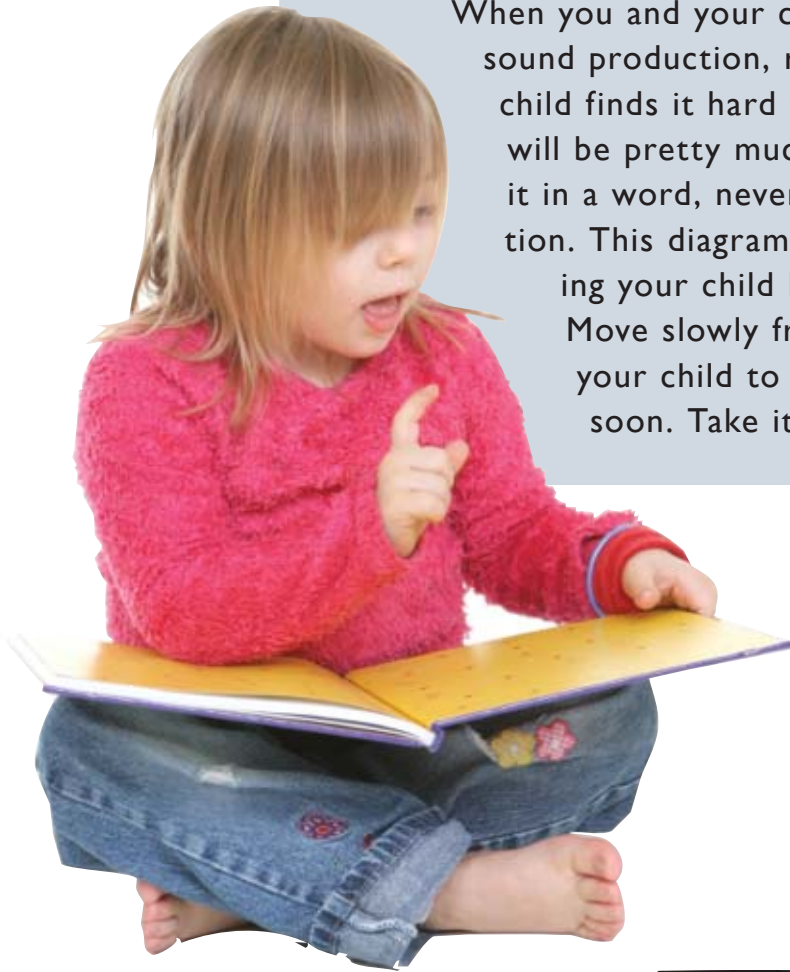
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Communication Matters is published biannually by the Haldimand-Norfolk Preschool Speech and Language program. It has been developed to increase awareness for services available and tips on the prevention of speech, language or hearing disorders in the preschool population. This newsletter is intended for parents, teachers and caregivers of preschool-aged children. You are invited to contact the Health Unit with your articles and ideas.

UP THE SOUND Staircase!

When you and your child are working on improving sound production, remember to start **SMALL**. If your child finds it hard to imitate the sound all by itself, it will be pretty much impossible for him or her to say it in a word, never mind use it correctly in conversation. This diagram shows the steps to take in helping your child learn to use a new speech sound. Move slowly from step to step and don't expect your child to use a sound spontaneously too soon. Take it easy, and have fun!



auditory bombardment (listening to the sound)





sound in everyday conversation



Language Home Programs

In a language home program, the SLP will outline specific activities you can use to help your child reach specific goals. For example, you and the SLP may together identify a list of words that you want your child to be able to say. Depending on your child's age, they may be the names of people, the names of things, action words or words associated with particular activities. As you identify words, your SLP will encourage you to think about words that will be rewarding for your child to say. For example, many parents feel it would be useful if the child could say a word that would indicate he or she needs to use the toilet. But this is a word that's really more useful for us as adults than for the child – he may not care if he makes it to the toilet on time, even though we care a lot! Early vocabulary targets should be things your child really wants and enjoys, so he/she learns that communication is useful to him or her.

If building your child's vocabulary has been

identified as a goal, your SLP will demonstrate ways that you can encourage your child's use of the word and will make sure you're comfortable with those strategies before you head out on your own. Strategies might include modelling the word (saying it simply and clearly for your child to hear) in a situation where he could use it himself; or adding a visual helper (using a sign, object, photo or Picture Communication Symbol) to help your child remember and learn how to attempt the spoken word.

Another example of a language home program might target the use of pronouns. By age 3 ½, children should use the pronouns he/she correctly. If, after this age, your child is confusing pronoun forms (e.g., "Him got him book"), a home program might be offered. Strategies might include modelling, but would also include more direct activities, such as picture cards and games that target your child's correct use of these forms.

Even very young children can benefit from a language Home Program. Your SLP may observe you in an interaction with your child. She may even make a brief videotape as you and your child play together. Based on this information, your SLP will help you set specific goals. Examples might be:

- Increasing the number of times your child starts an interaction, instead of passively waiting for you to involve him or her in an activity.
- Increasing the number of times your child takes a turn in play with you (e.g., building a block tower together).
- Increasing the number of times your child takes a turn vocalizing with you.

Again, your SLP will describe and demonstrate the techniques you can use, and answer your questions before expecting you to carry over the techniques at home.

Speech Home Programs

The sound system of English is fascinating. We use a variety of sounds, produced in different ways. Infants start with vowel sounds, produced by vibrating the vocal cords over a stream of air brought up from the lungs, and then changing the shape of the mouth. Try it yourself! Say "eeeee" and notice how you spread your lips wide. Then say "ooooo" and feel your lips moving forward.

As we get older and gain more control over the muscles of speech, we begin to add consonant sounds to our repertoire. Consonants require specific movements of the jaw, tongue, lips and teeth, coordinated with vocal cord vibration when needed. By the time we're adults, we've learned not only to produce all the consonant sounds in English, but to sequence them in connected speech. It's a complex task and it takes young children a few years to master:

If your SLP designs a speech sound home program for you, she will introduce you to the Sound Staircase. This is our way of showing you the levels of difficulty that a child masters as he or she learns a new sound. The child moves from hearing the sound (auditory bombardment) to practicing the sound by itself (e.g., ssssss) and then imitating you saying the sound in a syllable (e.g., sa) and finally a word (e.g., sun). After lots of imitation, the child learns to use the sound in a word spontaneously, without hearing someone else say it first. Then the child learns to imitate it in a short phrase (e.g., it's a sun), then to use it spontaneously in a phrase, then a sentence and finally in conversation (e.g., Mom, can I have some soup?). For those of us who learned to use speech sounds without conscious effort, it's enlightening to think about what a difficult task it is. The Sound Staircase helps us

understand how to make sound learning easier for a child.

Your SLP will tell you what sounds to target and whether they'll be at the beginning or end of words. For example, you may work on the /s/ sound at the start of a word (like "sun") or at the end of a word (like "house"). Your SLP will help you know how to keep track of your child's progress and when to make the activities provided easier or harder.

Home programs usually last for three months (12 weeks). After that time, your SLP will invite you and your child to return for re-assessment. Parents who weren't sure of their own ability to complete the home program are often surprised and proud to see the changes they've helped their child achieve!



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