



HALDIMAND-NORFOLK HEALTH UNIT

# COMMUNICATION MATTERS

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

## Early Identification

If you read parent books and magazines, you will often see the phrase “early identification.” This concept recognizes that if a child has difficulties in any developmental area, the earlier you notice and do something about it, the better.

At the Preschool Speech and Language Program, our motto is “No child is too young.” We encourage parents to contact us if they have any questions about their child’s communication skills, even if that child is an infant. This edition of *Communication Matters* is all about early identification – what happens in the early months of life, and how important it is to act NOW if you have any concerns.

## Brain Development

Did you know that at birth, the brain is the only organ that isn’t fully developed? More than 75% of the brain develops after birth, and most of that development happens in the first five years of life. Early childhood is the time when connections (synapses) form between brain cells (neurons). Trillions of synapses and the pathways they form make up the wiring of the brain. The number and organization of these connections has a huge influence on our ability to learn.

How do synapses form? Recent research shows that early experiences, both positive and negative, have a dramatic effect. Our interactions with the people and things in our environment are so important. The infant brain grows connections like flowers in a garden through the senses – what the baby hears, sees, feels, smells, tastes. If experience is lacking, the connections are pruned and the brain doesn’t grow.



From early infancy to early childhood, these vital connections are made permanent. The brain responds to experiences with physical changes. Since EVERYTHING is new during the first three years of life, this is when change happens most rapidly. The brain is at its most flexible. It’s prepared to learn.

## Learning Language

Learning language is a great example of how the brain absorbs information. Did you know that:

- By the age of **three months**, babies recognize the sounds of their native language?
- By the age of **six months**, they associate gestures to simple words (e.g., “bye-bye”)?
- By their **first birthday**, they understand many words and phrases, and can say a few words?
- By the age of **18 months**, they’re gaining as many as 10 new words every day?
- By the age of **three**, most children use long, fairly complex sentences and can make themselves understood to adults?

If a child is experiencing difficulty with any of these skills, the young brain does have the capacity to respond to intervention. That’s why it’s so important not to wait – to act NOW.

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## Speech and Language Difficulties

Approximately 7-10% of preschool children in Canada have a specific speech and language disorder (Beitchman, Nair, Clegg, & Patel, 1986). Many studies have shown that parents are skilled at identifying their children's needs. If you feel your child is having trouble communicating, you're probably right.

Because communication is such a complex process, a child may encounter difficulties in many areas. He or she may have trouble:

- Hearing other people.
- Understanding what is heard.
- Using appropriate voice volume and pitch.
- Making speech sounds.
- Producing words.
- Producing sentences.
- Speaking clearly enough to be understood.
- Speaking smoothly and fluently.
- Knowing how to play, alone or with others.
- Getting along with other children.

Difficulties with communication have a powerful impact on a child's self-esteem and on future learning at school. The enclosed "Communication Checklist" can help you determine if your child is communicating in age-appropriate ways.

Those of us who staff the Haldimand-Norfolk Preschool Speech and Language Program can help in any of these communication areas. You don't need a doctor's referral and there is no charge for our services. Many of our programs are specifically designed to engage the interest and skills of very young children, particularly in the 18- to 30-month range. Call the Parent Info Line at 1-866-463-2759.

**Don't delay - act today!**  
No child is too young.

## Early Intervention

You might be wondering: "What's a speech-language pathologist (SLP) going to do with an 18-month-old?" Many people, including well-meaning family members and even some family doctors, believe there is no need to refer a child this age, and advise parents to "wait and see." An 18-month-old without any words is most definitely language delayed and should be seen by a SLP.



New research shows that 42% of language-delayed 18-month-olds will "catch up" by age 30 months. That means 58% of them will not. These kids are more likely to remain below average in their social, language and academic development. The moral of the story: we can never be sure which preschoolers will catch up, and which won't. So we would like to see them all!

### We offer the following interventions:

#### Parent Consultation and Training

We have three parent-training options available:

- "It Takes Two to Talk" The Hanen Program for Parents – a 12-week program for parents of language-delayed preschoolers. The program includes nine weekly evening meetings, and three individual home visits.
- "More Than Words" (Hanen) – a 12-week program for parents of children with language and social difficulties (the kind often experienced by children experiencing an Autism Spectrum Disorder).
- "Talk About Fun" – parents and their children attend five morning sessions over five weeks.

Parents are trained in the art of language stimulation and basically become their child's language therapist! One of the most important strategies parents learn is how to become a **responsive partner**. A responsive partner is someone who observes the child's interest, waits to see what he or she will do, listens carefully to all sounds, grunts, noises or word attempts, and then follows his/her lead.

Many parents are advised by well-meaning family members and even some professionals to "teach" the child to talk by withholding items, e.g., *Don't give him the cookie until he says it!* or bombarding with questions, e.g., *What's this? What color is it? No,*

that's not right or instructions, e.g., Say 'please.' Can you say 'hat.' Research shows us that these types of interactions result in the child learning, saying and doing LESS. Children who are engaged with a responsive partner (who resists the urge to instruct, question or direct the play) talk, learn and do MORE.

Once parent and child have a positive interaction, language learning follows naturally. Parents learn specific strategies for adding language and experience at their child's level, in activities chosen by the child. Parents also learn to adapt book-sharing, music, play and daily activities as language-learning opportunities.

Parents may also attend an individual consultation in the clinic with their child's SLP to learn about the helpful strategies.

### Monitoring

We will schedule regular review appointments to ensure that any child who does not "catch up" is offered intervention.

### Group/Individual Sessions

We offer "Word Play" (five weekly group sessions) or individually scheduled sessions in the clinic with our staff to help build a child's vocabulary and increase use of phrases, using the Hanen strategies.

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## WORKSHOPS

### ATTENTION

*parents, teachers, early learning providers  
and anyone interested in learning about  
the communication skills of children ages 0-5 years.*

***Our workshops are FREE, and a children's program may be provided!***



Name of workshop	What you will learn	Norfolk: Where and When?	Haldimand: Where and When?
<b>Articulation</b> (how we pronounce words)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How and where speech sounds are made.</li> <li>• How speech develops.</li> <li>• Fun activities to help kids learn to sue sounds and words</li> </ul>	Norfolk Youth and Child Association (NYCA) 350 Colborne St. N. Simcoe Tuesday, April 3, 2007 7 p.m.	Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit 117 Forest Ave. Dunnville Wednesday, April 4, 2007 1 p.m.
<b>Fluency</b> (the opposite of fluency is "stuttering")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The difference between "normal non-fluency" and true "stuttering".</li> <li>• How to help a child develop more fluent speech.</li> </ul>	NYCA 350 Colborne St. N. Simcoe Tuesday, May 1, 2007 7 p.m.	Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit 117 Forest Ave. Dunnville Wednesday, May 2, 2007 7 p.m.
<b>Language and Literacy</b> (understanding and expressing using oral or written language)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The skills that lead to reading and writing.</li> <li>• Letter/print knowledge.</li> <li>• Sound awareness.</li> <li>• Oral language.</li> </ul>	NYCA 350 Colborne St. N. Simcoe Tuesday, May 8, 2007 7 p.m.	Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit 282 Argyle St. Caledonia Thursday, May 10, 2007 7 p.m.

To register, contact Debby Field-Mulder at 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623, Ext. 3243.

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## Training for Early Learning Providers

We are offering a new program this year. Teacher Talk is a Hanen training series based on *Learning Language and Loving It: The Hanen Program for Early Childhood Educators/Teachers*. It consists of three sessions:

- Encouraging Language Development in Early Childhood Settings.
- Let Language Lead the Way to Literacy.
- Fostering Peer Interaction in Early Childhood Settings.

These training sessions are being offered in Caledonia this spring, and again in Simcoe in the fall. If you're interested in registering, please call Debby Field-Mulder, Speech Program Secretary at 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623 Ext. 3243.

## Workshops

We will be offering several workshops open to parents, early learning providers and anyone in the community interested in learning more about preschoolers and their communication development. See details on page 3.

## Teacher Talk®

We're proud to be offering Teacher Talk® training in Caledonia this spring. Teacher Talk® is based on Learning Language and Loving It, the Hanen® Program for Early Childhood Educators/Teachers. This series of three trainings over a total of 20 hours covers the following topics:

- Encouraging Language Development in Early Childhood Settings.
- Let Language Lead the Way to Literacy.
- Fostering Peer Interaction in Early Childhood Settings.

Congratulations to staff of the following centres, who will be attending this first-ever Teacher Talk® in our area:

- McKinnon Park Child Care Centre, Caledonia.
- Buttons and Bows Cooperative Preschool, Hagersville.
- Happiness Is Cooperative Preschool, Cayuga.
- YWCA Child Care Centre, Cayuga.
- Ready, Set, School, Dunnville.



## Is your child registered for Junior Kindergarten (JK)?

Children in JK can access all our great services and intervention (including weekly or twice-weekly sessions) as long as the referral is made BEFORE the end of December of the JK year.



If your child is referred "late," parents may attend a workshop, speak with a speech-language pathologist (SLP) from the Haldimand-Norfolk

Preschool Speech and Language Program, and "Meet the SLP" at your local Ontario Early Years Centre. We can provide you with information on how to access school-based services in Senior Kindergarten (SK), and link you with our local support group, the Grand Erie Chapter of the Ontario Association for Families with Children with Communication Disorders.

## Is your child attending JK or SK?

Usually, school-based services are less frequent and may be longer to access. Ask your child's teacher or principal for a referral to your school's SLP.

*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.*



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