



Guidelines for Choosing a Speech-Language Pathologist

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When your child has been diagnosed with a language delay, perhaps the first question that comes to mind is, “Now what?” As a parent, you want to make sure you know what steps to take next. You want to move in a direction that will help your child learn to communicate more effectively and you want to move in this direction with confidence. You shouldn’t feel alone when looking for answers. Choosing the right therapist can help you begin to answer the “Now what?” question in a way that makes the most sense for your family and your child. So, a more specific question that could be answered is “What should I look for in a speech-language pathologist or therapist?”

To help you answer this more specific question, The Hanen Centre polled a number of Hanen trained speech-language pathologists around the globe to find out what they suggest a parent should look for when choosing the right therapist. Below is a compilation of what these therapists had to say.

The third most popular answer: The therapist needs to be child-friendly.

This sounds simple enough, but we can’t take it for granted. If your child isn’t comfortable, he/she will not be able to learn. Thus, watch the therapist interacting with your child. Is she on the floor with him? Is she trying to find out what interests him? Does your child seem to be having fun? Does your child seem willing to interact with this therapist? If you can answer yes to these questions, then chances are your child will be ready to learn.

The second most popular answer: The therapist needs to be experienced and knowledgeable.

A good therapist should know what kind of treatment is best for your child. In addition, this treatment should be based on research. The bottom line is that this therapist should appear to know what he/she is talking about. Finally, you should feel comfortable with the amount of experience this therapist has with children similar to yours. In keeping with the questions theme, some questions you can ask to help you decide whether or not this therapist is experienced and knowledgeable in early language intervention are:

- How much of your caseload is made up of children like mine?
- Can I talk to some other parents who you have worked with?

- What treatment do you recommend and why? What's the evidence that supports these recommendations? Where can I learn more about this kind of treatment?

The most popular answer: The therapist considers the parent to be an intervention partner.

A good therapist realizes that, because the time he/she spends with the child is limited and because parents are so important in a child's life, parents need to be involved in the intervention and play a major role. To truly make a difference, the parent needs to be confident in what he/she is doing to help the child so that intervention goes beyond the specific treatment session and continues throughout the child's day.

In addition, a good therapist is respectful of the parent and includes the parent in the decision-making process. A parent who feels as if he/she is always being told what to do is not truly a partner. At The Hanen Centre, we frequently suggest that parents use the strategy of Observe, Wait, and Listen when interacting with their child (OWLing). A good therapist will adapt this strategy for use during her interactions with the parent.

This therapist ...

- **Observes:** takes the time to discover what is important to the parent
- **Waits:** gives the parent time to talk about what is important to her/him
- **Listens:** responds to what the parent says to show he/she has been heard