



Parents' role in language intervention

By Lauren Lowry
Hanen SLP & Clinical Writer

If your child recently started intervention for his or her language delay, you may be asking yourself: "What is my role in my child's therapy?" If you feel unsure about your involvement in the therapy process, you are not alone...

A new study looked at parents' expectations as they started language intervention for their child [1]. They found that:

- Many parents expected that the speech language pathologist would be the one carrying out the therapy directly with their child
- While parents were willing to be involved in therapy, they were uncertain about what would be expected of them. Some parents felt anxious about their involvement.
- Parents were uncertain about their ability to carry out the intervention themselves at home

It's perfectly normal to feel uneasy as you begin the intervention process. And it can be even more unnerving to find out that you will be the focus of the therapy for your child! While parents used to simply watch the speech language pathologist provide therapy for their child, language intervention for preschoolers nowadays often focusses on helping parents learn strategies they will use with their child in everyday situations to help their child develop certain language skills.

A wonderfully honest father once summed up his hesitation about this process by saying,

"I'm not an expert in language delay – how can I possibly do this as well as a speech language pathologist?!"

While you didn't learn about language development in school, you have many other important qualifications that your child's speech language pathologist lacks:

- you are your child's first and best teacher
- you are a constant in your child's everyday life

- you spend more time talking to and interacting with your child than a speech language pathologist ever can
- you know your child best and know what makes him or her “tick”

For most children, seeing a speech language pathologist once per week isn't enough time to develop language skills. In fact, it's hard to learn any new skill if it's only practiced for one hour per week. But if you work together with your child's speech language pathologist, you can come up with goals and activities that you can do at home during your everyday life that will make a huge difference in your child's language learning. Ultimately, you can provide language intervention every day, many times a day, as you go through your daily routines. Bath time, eating a meal, going for a ride in the car, or any other daily activity can be an opportunity to practice communicating.

Ways parents can get involved in intervention

There are many ways that you can play an active role in your child's intervention, such as:

- helping set goals for your child with the speech language pathologist
- describing daily activities and routines
- learning strategies that you can use at home that will build your child's communication skills
- reporting changes and progress you see in your child
- determining next steps with the speech language pathologist

“For most children, seeing a speech language pathologist once per week isn't enough time to develop language skills...But if you work together with your child's speech language pathologist, you can come up with goals and activities that you can do at home during your everyday life that will make a huge difference in your child's language learning.”

By working together with your child's speech language pathologist, you become the primary person delivering the therapy and the speech language pathologist functions as your coach and consultant. We call this way of working together “[parent-implemented intervention](#)”.

Right about now you may be thinking:

“Is this really effective? Wouldn't my child learn more if the speech language pathologist provided the therapy directly to my child?”

Research shows that parents make a difference

Researchers have studied whether parents are as effective as speech language pathologists in providing language intervention...

Two new studies found that [2,3]:

- parents can learn to use strategies in everyday life to help their child
- when parents use these strategies, their children's language skills improve
- parents can be as effective as speech language pathologists in delivering language intervention

And some studies have even shown that [3,4]:

- parents can have a greater impact on children's language skills than speech language pathologists!

So if you feel uneasy about taking a front seat in your child's therapy or are unsure about how well you'll be able to help your child, rest assured. Research shows that parents can be as effective (if not more effective!) as speech language pathologists when it comes to providing intervention for young children with language delay. The everyday interactions you have with your child provide countless opportunities for language learning. And you won't be alone in the process – your speech language pathologists will be there to guide you and provide advice so that you ensure you are helping your child reach his or her potential.



To help you turn everyday activities into opportunities for learning, the [2018 Preschool Language and Literacy Calendar](#) offers fun and simple tips to build your child's communication skills. Each tip in the calendar is based on the latest research, and includes suggestions for helping all children reach their potential, including typically developing children and children with language delay. The ideas in the calendar are practical and easy-to-do, so that you can make language and literacy learning a fun and natural part of your child's day.

References

1. Davies, K. E., Marshall, J., Brown, L. J. E. & Goldbart, J. (2017). Co-working: Parents' conception of roles in supporting their children's speech and language development. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 33(2), 171-185.
2. Rakap, S. & Rakap, S. (2014). Parent-implemented naturalistic language interventions for young children with disabilities: A systematic review of single-subject experimental designs. *Educational Research Review*, 13, 35-51.
3. DeVeney, S. L., Hagaman, J. L. & Bjornsen, A. L. (2017). Parent-implemented versus clinician-directed interventions
4. Roberts, M., & Kaiser, A. (2011). The Effectiveness of Parent-Implemented Language Intervention: A Meta-Analysis. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 20, 180–199.

About The Hanen Centre

Founded in 1975, The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization with a global reach. Its mission is to provide parents, caregivers, early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and training they need to help young children develop the best possible language, social and literacy skills. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically.

For more information, please visit www.hanen.org.

The Hanen Centre is a Registered Charitable Organization (#11895 2357 RR0001)