



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER

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OAFCCD UPDATE

OAFCCD has been fortunate to receive a number of project grants in recent years. Funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ministry of Education Parents Reaching Out Grant have enabled OAFCCD to provide over 75 workshops in the last two years. Funding has also supported the development of a new website, OAFCCD Parents as Partners and the development of many new parent resources.

OAFCCD has also been very fortunate for the many years of wonderful support that has been provided by the Barbershop Singers and the Harmonize for Speech Fund. Annual grants from the Barbershoppers have been critical in covering on-going operating costs. Membership fees and donations are also very important to the organization.

Unfortunately, the number of new and renewing members has decreased over recent years and OAFCCD is facing a major challenge to maintain activities.

You can help by sending your membership renewal today. You can also support OAFCCD by making a donation. OAFCCD is a recognized charity and you will get a tax receipt. Donate by sending a cheque with your renewal, or on-line through CanadaHelps. The CanadaHelps Website can accept credit card donations and issue immediate tax receipts. CanadaHelps website is at: www.canadahelps.org

OAFCCD also needs more volunteers. You can help families of children with speech and language problems, by volunteering as Special Education Advisory Committee Representative, a Chapter contact or a Board member. Help is also needed for writing and editing new parent articles. If you would like to help, please contact Alison Morse at 519-842-9506.

OAFCCD

Membership Renewal Enclosed

Please renew your membership and consider a donation. Include a donation with your membership cheque, or donate with a credit card on the secure website for Canadian charities at www.CanadaHelps.org Select the Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders and make a difference!

The Social Consequences of Language Disorders: When You Don't Know the Rules, You Can't Play the Game

The relationship between behaviour disorders and language disorders is not well understood. However, numerous studies have shown that many children with antisocial behaviour disorders will also have a language disorder. It is therefore important that any plans to help the child with behaviour problems should include strategies to identify and address language disorder.

For children *at risk*, the importance of communication competence has been established. Language provides the main method of establishing and maintaining social relationships, constitutes a principal means of organizing behaviour and is central to the successful acquisition of many cognitive and academic skills, particularly literacy. It is clear that language acquisition is an integral component in the development of an individual and failure of the language system can have effects upon social, academic and vocational success

Researchers has found that the presence of language disorders in the behavioural disordered school-age child may be as high as 71-89%, which is almost 10 times higher than prevalence estimates in the general school population.

The following problems may be observed:

- Consistent difficulties in listening, particularly for decontextualized material which must be processed quickly.
- Difficulties in understanding multiple meanings of words and figures of speech.
- Difficulties in inferencing (filling-in) for missing information.
- Difficulties in producing syntactically complex sentences.

Long-term studies have repeatedly shown that language impairments continue into adulthood and create educational, social and vocational problems.

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Most frequently cited difficulties among children identified as having behavioural and emotional problems include:

- language output not adapted to listener needs
- difficulties introducing, maintaining, and changing topics
- fewer socially positive utterances produced within interactions
- insufficient verbalization during tasks

It is important that student's who have emotional and behavioural problems should be screened for language problems and, if necessary, provided with detailed assessments. When a student does have a language disorder as well as a behaviour or emotional problem, intervention strategies should address the student's language disorder. In addition, parents and teachers will need to understand the implications of a language disorder and how it will impact their behaviour (e.g., the difference between not comprehending instructions or directions and noncompliance, how they can help the child comprehend and express themselves, etc.)

Many students that have exhibited emotional behavioral problems and weak language skills will need assistance to develop social communication skills. Language rules are complex and are usually learned by children who extract the rules, or infer the rules from the way that people speak and behave. Students with language disorders have great difficulty in identifying the rules of social communication, and as a result their communication and behaviour may not conform to normal expectations. In order to learn these rules of language and behaviour, they will need to have the necessary communication skills identified and taught. They will also need lots of opportunities to practice and learn how to carry the skills over to other settings and situations.

Programs to address the language needs of children with co-occurring language and emotional behavioural problems should:

- teach communicative alternatives
- build event-based/script knowledge for socially or emotionally difficult situations
- provide opportunities for communication success and positive reinforcement
- develop broader and more varied emotional vocabularies

Sources: Adapted with permission from Warr-Leeper, G., Wright, N. and Mack, A. (1994) Language Disabilities of Antisocial boys in Residential Treatment. Journal of Behavioral Disorders, 19(3),159-170. and Social Skills Training for School Age Children with Language And Behaviour Deficits by Genese Warr-Leeper, University of Western Ontario

A Parent Perspective

What do you mean my child can't understand me?

It came as a shock when the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) tried to explain that our child has receptive and expressive language disorders. It is easy to understand that the mechanics of articulation can be difficult and who hasn't had trouble remembering names and labels? But what do you mean my child can't understand me? He talks all the time. He follows directions.

It seems our language is full of secrets – so secret that most of us don't realize the rules, and my child definitely doesn't. My child is trying to figure out the puzzle that I didn't even realize I use.

I often explain his language difficulties as “the man from Mars, who has landed on Earth, and doesn't understand what we are trying to say.” Of course, my child does have language. He has been speaking since he was little. He has spent years learning and has succeeded. But his language is the comfy and familiar, like wearing “house clothes” verses “daywear” or “work wear.”

I now understand that his early language was very “.com” style. He didn't speak words, he spoke phrases. “Time for bed” or “get in the tub” was perceived in his mind as “timeforbed” or “getinthetub”. Ironically, a very “now” concept in this age of the Internet. However, when it came to reading, no knowledge of each word being separate causes immense difficulty especially when trying to decipher a book.

Thank you, to the Speech Language Pathologist who I treated like she was crazy. Understanding my child's Communication Disorder is and was the first step to helping him. She has become my best resource in a crazy world where I discover how much I don't know about language. My puzzle is not the hidden language secrets but how to share those secrets with my son and the society we live in.

So how does my child learn?

It was the beginning of a new school year and, as none of the school staff who were familiar with my son were returning, I had to meet with the new educators to try to explain my son and his needs. After describing receptive and expressive language disorders, everyone looked just as confused as before I started. The inevitable question came up - “How does he learn?” “How do we teach him?”

Most of us are familiar with different learning styles; verbal, auditory, hands on, etc. and although most teachers

plan lessons that allow for these learning styles, the complication of a language disorder turned every teacher my son had into Charlie Brown's teacher - so that all he heard was; "wah wah wah!"

Previous teachers had tried many things. My tongue-in-cheek favourite was when the Special Education Teacher (SET) described how he was using a computer program to learn to read. Apparently he loved it, but he was becoming frustrated because he wasn't able to move on. The program wouldn't let him because he wasn't grasping the basics. Our frustration over the lack of progress became so intense that I appreciated the honesty of the one SET who after almost a year of trying confided; "we don't know how to teach him."

As his parents, we were desperate for him to read. We believe reading is the building block for learning and that it would open many doors for him. Research brought us to a teaching method called Direct Instruction. Pioneered in the 1960's Direct Instruction (D.I.) refers to the specific programs designed by Siegfried Engelmann and his staff at the University of Oregon.

Direct Instruction is an interactive, mastery based style of teaching that introduces skills in a carefully sequenced manner. For a new skill to be consolidated, concepts need to be taught one at a time, and objectives need to be taught from simple to complex in continuous strands of activities. Once a skill is mastered in isolation, it is then gradually expanded for generalization, integration with other skills, and independent application. The massed repetitions, cumulative review, and ongoing testing ensure that once skills are introduced they are practiced and consolidated for generalization.

After enrolling our son in a tutoring program using the D.I. method we observed lessons that utilized reading decoding hints similar to those that his Speech Pathologist was using to teach him to speak. For example hand gestures and modeling that, in our mind, essentially explained and practiced the hidden rules.

We knew we had found a good teacher match when, during a bedtime chat, my son was surprised to learn that his new teacher was teaching him to read. He exclaimed how easy it was. Two years later he now says, "Thanks for my reading life."

My favourite E.A.

She wasn't my favourite because she taught him to read. She wasn't even his Educational Assistant (EA) for very long. She was my favourite EA because she "got it." She got that my son was not a behaviour problem. She got

that he wasn't the result of poor parenting. She got that he had a Language Disorder. She got that he had a

Communication Disorder. She got that all he needed was protection. He needed protection from himself. He needed protection from others. He needed protection from the confusion around him.

Children with Communication Disorders struggle to understand the world around them. They also struggle to interpret the language and social clues, which results in feelings of frustration, which may lead to poor behaviour choices.

These children react to what they perceive is happening, to them and around them. If their interpretation is incorrect, then their behaviour may not be appropriate, and their behaviour may escalate unnecessarily without the proper interference. Further danger lurks in the misinterpretation of their behaviours by others.

Misinterpretations and perception are the dangers that these children face daily and the dangers that they need protection from. They need guidance, they need support, they need an interpreter and they need the reassurance.

Behaviours are a way of Communicating

I cheered the day my son stuck his tongue out at his teacher. He was in Kindergarten. He was communicating!

Children with Communication Disorders have huge struggles when communicating. It is my belief that any and all attempts at communication should be encouraged and respected. It is my belief that such unconditional support encourages further attempts at communicating and fosters self-confidence and further gains. The challenge is to see such communication as positive attempts at communicating.

Let me clarify - I was at the school for the parent observation part of his first term, Kindergarten, reporting period. He was unhappy about what she wanted him to do and he was telling her so. I would never have accepted this kind of behaviour from my "verbal" children but because of this child's Language Disorder, it is acceptable behaviour.

Behaviours are reactionary. Behaviours are communication. They tell the world when we are happy, sad, confused etc. Behaviours should be "listened" to. It should be normal for kids who can't make themselves understood verbally to "act out." It should be expected that they will use body language to communicate. It should be a good thing - fun, like a game of charades! Truly, all the world is a stage and our children merely actors.

Parent Perspective by Susan Strachan

Individual Education Plans (IEP) Developing Effective IEPs for Student Success

Over the past few years school efforts to support students with special education needs has evolved from labels and identification to a focus on the teaching strategies and individual student program. At the same time the Ministry of Education has increased the emphasis on accountability and student outcomes. This key tool to document the teaching strategies, the student's program and to measure student outcomes is the Individual education Plan (IEP).

Parents have an important role in the development and monitoring of the IEP, and it is vital that parents understand the contents of the IEP and how it links with the Report card. The Ministry of Education has a number of resources to help parents understand the IEP. Recently, the Ministry has provided an on-line copy of the provincial IEP template for parents to view. This website enables parents to see all of the sections and the "drop down menus" (list of options) that are available to complete the form. The IEP template document is available at <https://.iep.edu.gov.on.ca/IEPWeb> and can be opened with the following:

Username: IEPDemo
Password: demo

Parents should note that not all school boards use the Ministry of Education template, and your school board IEP may look different and have the sections in a different order. However, all IEPs must meet the Ministry of Education Provincial Standards for Individual Education Plans and should include all the same items. For more information on IEPs you can check the following documents, available on the Ministry of Education website and on the OAFCCD Parents as Partners Website:

- **The Individual Education Plan (IEP) A Resource Guide (2004)**
- **Individual Education Plans Standards for Development, Program Planning, and Implementation (2000)**

OAFCCD has also developed a number of resources to help parents understand the IEP and their role in the IEP Process. The following documents can be found on the OAFCCD Website at www.oafccd.com

- **The Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.), Frequently Asked Questions**
- **Individual Education Plans, The Parent Role**
- **Preparing for an Individual Education Plan (IEP)**
- **Glossary of Special Education Terms used in Ontario Schools**

Parent Role in the IEP

Parents can help by:

- ◆ Sharing any relevant reports and assessment results
- ◆ Sharing their ideas about what strategies have worked in the past, or at home
- ◆ Sharing information about the child's abilities and interests and any concerns about the child's health, learning or schoolwork
- ◆ Agreeing to the child doing any tests that may be helpful
- ◆ Agreeing to the school contacting any doctors or other professionals that are involved with the child
- ◆ Signing informed consent forms needed for professional assessments and to allow communication with other relevant professionals
- ◆ Keeping a good record of the reports, test results, appointments and discussions with school staff

OAFCCD Parents As Partners Website

Check out the website at: www.parents-as-partners.ca for more parent articles on partnering with school staff, and understanding special education.

Thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for funding the Website and OAFCCD Parents As Partners Program.



Congratulations!

Professor Genese Warr-Leeper was honoured at the 2008 Annual General Meeting with the George Shields Volunteer Award. The George Shields Volunteer Award recognizes members of OAFCCD who have made an outstanding contribution to the organization and have provided valuable support to families of children with communication disorders.

Genese is a founding member of OAFCCD and has contributed to the organization as a Board Member and as an "Information Officer". Genese is a Professor at the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Western Ontario. Genese has led many research studies and published numerous papers about the treatment and impact of language disorders.

As the OAFCCD "Information Officer", Genese has provided the research and evidence that have been used in the development of OAFCCD Position Papers and Parent Articles. Genese is a strong voice for children and a powerful advocate for Speech and Language Services in Ontario. Thank you Genese!