



## Advisory Information for Parents

### What to Expect when a Child Requires an Assessment with a Speech and Language Therapist

An initial assessment appointment for a child that has not attended for speech and language therapy (SLT) can be a daunting experience for both parent and child.

Herein is information on what to expect and what will happen.....tips and advice contained also.

#### The Environment

Speech and Language therapy clinics are filled with toys and the Speech & Language Therapist (SLT) will try to put your child at ease through play and try to get them settled before they move on to the next section, which involves a discussion with the parent and a brief interview on your child's medical and developmental history.

#### Case History

A **Case History** is an informal interview that the SLT will conduct with one or both parents. It is usually just a structured conversation on your child's biographical, medical and developmental history, which can also include some discussion of the child's current level of language use and other communication-related questions. The purpose of the Case History is to get a full picture of the child and their development and to help the SLT identify any factors that may have contributed to your child's difficulties.

**Tips for Being Prepared:** Before the assessment session try to brainstorm information on your child's developmental history as your SLT may request information such as the ages that your child started:

- Babbling (making sounds)
- Using their first words
- Using two words together
- Crawling
- Walking
- Dressing independently
- Feeding Independently
- Using the toilet independently

Your SLT may also ask for information about how many words your child currently uses. This can be difficult to think of off-hand, so another **TIP** is to keep a **Communication Log**. This is a small book/ pad that you can keep nearby and use to write down the words that your child uses. Every time that you hear your child use a new word, you can write it into the Log and keep it as a record. By doing this, you can easily add up the number of words that your child uses and pass this information on to the SLT. Another idea is to bring the Communication Log along to the Initial Assessment appointment to show the SLT.

## The Assessment.

The way in which the assessment is carried out will depend on your child age and abilities. For younger children the assessment will be carried out through playing with different toys such as dolls, teddies, tea sets, blocks, etc.. The SLT may observe the child playing alone or with you or their sibling initially and then become more involved in the play themselves. For younger children in particular, a part of the assessment may involve a parental questionnaire, which is a structured interview involving questions about your child's skills. SLTs recognise that parents hold a wealth of information on their children's skills and these interviews give the SLT a good insight into your child's level of ability.

For older children (of school-age or above) the assessment is more formal and will usually be carried out using standardised assessments. These are typically in the form of pictures and/or words, where the child will be asked to identify, name or remember instructions based on the information contained on the page. Standardised assessments are ones which are divided into different sections (or subtests) and must be carried out by the SLT in a particular way. The scores of these assessments allow the SLT to compare your child's performance against other children of a similar age.

Here is an idea of some of the more general things that your SLT may assess:

<b>Speech sounds</b>	These are the sounds that are combined to make words. The words themselves and how your child uses them are part of their language system.
<b>Oro-motor/ Motor Speech</b>	Your child's ability to move the muscles of their mouth. The purpose of this assessment is to examine how your child can use the muscles of their mouth for both speech and non-speech tasks. An Oro-motor assessment can also be carried out as a central part of an assessment for Feeding, Eating, Drinking and Swallowing (FEDS) difficulties.
<b>Receptive Language Skills</b>	This means your child's understanding of the language used by others in conversation.
<b>Expressive Language Skills</b>	This is how your child uses words/ sentences to express himself/ herself and get his/ her message across.
<b>Fluency/ Stuttering / Stammering -</b>	Examining both primary and secondary characteristics of stammering. In this instance your SLT may discuss the process of assessment with you at the beginning of the session.
<b>Feeding, Eating, Drinking and Swallowing (FEDS)</b>	For children who have difficulty with any of these. A FEDS assessment is not a standard part of every initial assessment. This will only be carried out if concerns have been raised about your child's FEDS skills. A FEDS assessment for a child will usually involve observing your child eating a meal in order to assess things like drooling, chewing skills, the safety of the child's swallow, seating position and posture during meals, ability to feed independently, negative reactions to certain foods, colours, and textures.

**Feedback.**

Once the assessment has been completed your SLT will give you some verbal feedback on the information that they have gathered. You will also be presented with an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the assessment and results with the SLT.

**TIP:** It may be useful for you at this time to take some notes on what the SLT is saying as it can be a lot of information to process during a conversation. Taking notes will allow you to reflect on this information after you have left the appointment and also to keep this information for your records.

Your SLT will discuss the plan for moving forward with you and what steps will need to be taken to best suit your child's needs. The SLT will also discuss whether or not there is a need for a block of speech and language therapy as indicated by the results of the assessment. A follow up appointment will then be scheduled if necessary.

**What the Professionals Recommend:-**

When attending for an assessment with a Speech & Language Therapist the most important thing is to be relaxed and prepared for the session by following the tips above.

By bringing your child for an assessment you are taking a positive step towards helping them to reach their potential; so do not worry about the outcomes, think of it as the first step towards helping them.

A Speech and Language Therapist is there to help and may be able to answer any questions or address your queries by phone before the assessment session.

*Note: It is important to note that the actual assessment process is different depending on what the needs of the particular child are.*

If you are concerned that your child has communication or feeding difficulties consult your local Speech and Language Therapist/ local health centre / GP.