



Christine Kendall & Gloria Staios (Speech Pathologists)
The Role of the Speech Pathologist

Christine:

Speech pathologists are skilled at teaching children to understand and use language in a social context, this includes all of their environments. With a child with autism, you may need to help in a number of areas. For example, using visuals to help children understand because you also have the behavioural component that often comes in due to frustration that is caused by communication difficulties. A speech pathologist uses skills to look at all of those areas. It may well be that the child has difficulty with articulation, or with getting their message across, they don't have enough speech, we would be looking at all of those sorts of skills.

There is no one size fits all for any child with autism or for any child that you might be seeing in therapy. We would have a look at the child and with the parent decide what is going to be the appropriate skills to work on. This will depend on the age of the child, the skills of the child, the situation of the family, all of those things are going to impact on the decisions that we would make with the parent and determine the therapy.

Gloria:

Having thought about all of those things (mentioned above) first, we would then be looking at what do we do as speech pathologists specifically:

- if the child has no speech we would be looking at how can we give this child a form of communication that is going to alleviate his frustration?
- if the child did have speech we would specifically look at;
 - o how clear is the child's speech?
 - o does the child need some additional work because other people don't understand what he is saying?
 - o what kind of language does the child have?
 - o how much does the child understand of spoken language?
 - o then is he able to use spoken language to communicate his messages?
 - o is there a need for us to then intervene to increase vocabulary to look at helping with grammatical structure as well as then to teach the child how to use those building blocks of language in various different social contexts and that is what we refer to as pragmatic language development.

So there are many aspects of speech pathology that needs to be covered when we are looking at the needs of the child. How best we do that will depend on all of those things that Chris mentioned before.



Christine:

Having worked in the area of autism for many years, we obviously have spent a lot of time skilling ourselves up to make sure that we are aware of all of the different approaches and therapies that are available to families and children with autism. That includes things like DIR Floortime, ABA, ESDM, Hanen, there are lots of different approaches out there and we would see that a good therapist knows about all of those different approaches and is aware of the different things that it is important to include. Each of those approaches are terrific, but it doesn't necessarily incorporate all of the aspects that a speech pathologist would be using or considering when working with a child.

Gloria:

Parents really need to consider consulting a speech pathologist if they make a decision to be implementing any one of those kinds of programs, purely because, from a speech pathology point of view, we can present to the families and make sure that some of the language based goals within those programs are developmentally appropriate, and perhaps also relevant to the child in all other contexts as well.

Some of those programs don't consider those things and you might also have children that have articulation issues, as well as pragmatic language problems, and again not all of those programs would necessarily incorporate some intervention to improve those skills as well. So it is really important to consult with a speech pathologist just to make sure that you've got that completeness within your program.

*** This is an approximate transcription only; minor modifications have been made to assist the reader.*