

## What You Need to Know About Your Child's Speech/Language Evaluation at School

By Dale Ducworth, M.C.D., CCC-SLP

If a teacher refers your child for a speech and language evaluation at school, you may have questions about what to expect. Below are common questions parents ask that may help you understand why your child was referred and what will take place during the evaluation.



### Why Does My Child Need a Speech and Language Evaluation?

There are a number of reasons that a child may need a speech/language evaluation. A child may need an evaluation if he/she can't say certain sounds (e.g., "tat" for "cat" or "wain" for "rain") or if people have trouble understanding his/her speech. Sometimes children have trouble understanding what is said to them or can't express what they want to say to others. Another reason that a child may need an evaluation is because he/she has a hoarse voice quality. Also, a child who repeats too many words or phrases when speaking may need an evaluation for stuttering.

### Who May Refer a Child for an Evaluation?

Many schools screen students for possible speech and language problems. If your child fails a speech and language screening, it does not necessarily mean that your child needs therapy, but that he/she needs more in-depth evaluation. Schools do not need permission to perform mass screenings.

Sometimes, a teacher refers a student for an evaluation. A teacher may recognize that the student is having speech problems that are interfering with the child's academic progress and recommend an evaluation.

Parents may also request an evaluation if they have concerns about their child's speech/language development. If you suspect that your child may have speech/language problems, contact your school's district office to arrange an evaluation.

### Who Does the Evaluation?

Speech/language evaluations are conducted by a speech/language pathologist (SLP), who is certified by your state's educational department or licensed by your state.

## **What Happens During the Evaluation?**

First, the SLP or school nurse conducts a hearing screening to rule out hearing loss as a possible cause of the speech/language problem. The hearing screening should not be done when the child is suffering from a cold or allergies, because these conditions can cause mild temporary hearing loss. After the hearing screening the SLP gives an articulation test (speech sounds) and/or language tests (receptive and expressive) to assess how your child's speech and language skills compare with other children his or her age. The SLP also evaluates your child's voice quality and fluency of speech to rule out any voice or stuttering problems. If there is a problem with either voice or fluency, the SLP tests further.



## **How Long Does the Evaluation Take?**

Evaluations vary depending on how many tests and the type of tests that the SLP gives. Generally speaking, the average time for evaluation is one hour, but some evaluations last longer. The SLP may evaluate children with a short attention span over two days.

## **Do I Have to Give My Permission for the Speech/Language Pathologist to Do an Evaluation?**

Yes. Prior to the evaluation, you sign a form giving your permission for your child to receive an evaluation. Either a parent or legal guardian signs the permission form. The SLP notifies you of the date the evaluations will take place.

## **What Can I Do to Help My Child Prior to an Evaluation?**

The most important thing you can do to help your child do his/her best on an evaluation is to be sure he/she gets a good night's rest and a good breakfast. If your child is not feeling well, notify the SLP and reschedule for another day. Inform your child that he/she will be receiving an evaluation, but be careful not to say anything that will cause him/her to be overly stressed about it. For very young children, it is usually enough to say, "A teacher will come to your room today and take you with her to look at some pictures."

## **What Happens after the Evaluation?**

Following the evaluation, the SLP invites you to attend an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meeting. He/She will inform you of the results of the evaluation and the plan for remediation if the results of the evaluation indicate therapy is needed).