A guide about

Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia

Verbal Dyspraxia or Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia (DVD) has been defined by Ripley, Daines and Barrett (1997) as ‘a condition where the child has difficulty in making and co-ordinating the precise movements which are used in the production of spoken language, although there is no damage to muscles or nerves’

The word ‘dyspraxia’ means difficulty with learned patterns of movement. Children with DVD have difficulty making and co-ordinating the precise movements of the speech muscles or nerves. There is no damage to muscles or nerves.

The speech muscles include:

- The lips
- The tongue
- The soft palate - the muscle at the back of the mouth which closes off the nasal passage for blowing, sucking, swallowing and speaking
- The larynx (voice box)
- The muscles which control breathing for speech.

Speech therapy for children with DVD

The most important aspect of speech therapy for children with DVD is practise and repetition of the work daily. This is why parents, school, nursery and the Speech and Language Therapist need to work as a team so the child can continue the exercises daily.

Following specialist assessment, speech therapy sessions may be based on the following areas:

- raising awareness of the movements of the mouth and tongue (oro-motor skills)
- improving speed, rhythm, volume and intonation of speech
- helping the child to produce single speech sounds
- improving the ability to repeat speech sounds and to swap from one sound to another
- helping the child to sequence these sounds accurately within words
- building up from words to sentences.

Children with DVD will show more than one of the following characteristics:

- variable and inconsistent speech sound patterns
- speech motor behaviours such as ‘groping’ for sounds, difficulty sequencing sounds or oro-motor difficulties
- increased errors in longer or more complex words or phrases
- difficulty in controlling the speed, rhythm and volume
- overuse of one sound (favourite articulation).

Children with DVD may have one or some of the following co-existing characteristics:

- difficulties with understanding and using language
- difficulties with language organisation, particularly sequencing
- difficulties with social interaction with peers
- feeding difficulties (or history of)
- atypical developmental of early speech skills, such as babbling
- Generalised Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD or Dyspraxia) affecting other parts of the body.
What will progress be like?
Rate of progress varies considerably from child to child. Children with DVD find speech work difficult and progress will be slow, probably taking years rather than months, although this depends on the severity of the problem and the amount of work that can be continued at home, school and/or nursery. We expect steady progress to be made so most children should end up with clear, intelligible speech.

How to help
A Speech and Language Therapist can assess and treat these disorders as well as provide specific advice for individual children. There are several things parents and teachers can do in addition:
• Try not to worry as this can make your child anxious and less able to make themselves understood.
• Try to be relaxed and give your child good examples of speech, to watch and to listen to, by using short sentences and good, clear speech.
• Encourage your child to use gesture to point, or indicate by movements, what they wish to communicate. Play at making happy faces, sad faces, surprised faces and funny faces to encourage your child to use facial expression in order to convey what they mean or want.

Useful websites
The following websites have further information for parents and staff:
• Talking Point www.talkingpoint.org.uk
• Afasic www.afasic.org.uk
• Dyspraxia Foundation www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

Contact us
Visit www.kentcht.nhs.uk/cits or contact our speech and language therapists at the Children's Integrated Therapy Service if you have any queries or concerns regarding the information in this leaflet.

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