

The Speech-Language Pathologist Vasu Govindasamy

What question are you asked most frequently - and what's the answer?

Parents usually ask me "when will my child talk and whether or not she can attend normal school?" If this question came from committed and involved parents with a 'straight kid' (children with no other problems aside from a mild to moderate speech or language delay), I would propose a three to six months of therapy before re-evaluating the child. Children usually do well with therapy and it is common for them to improve by one standard deviation or close to normal levels. It is also likely they will be able to study in regular mainstream schools. It is important for children with slight speech delay to be in normal schools as they learn best when immersed with normal speaking and functioning children. Children with severe communicative delays (speech, language and cognition) will need help from other professionals such as occupational therapist and educational psychologist because they may have other learning disabilities.

I am also asked: "will my future children have the same speech and language problems?" I rarely come across a family whereby all the children are born with the same degree of speech and language disability.

What is your key piece of advice to parents?

Take the initiative to be continuously educated and get on the "information highway" regularly. Parents may keep abreast of their children's developmental milestones from free websites such as www.babycenter.com. If you suspect something is wrong with your child's speech and language, seek professional advice from speech therapy clinics. In your first session in a speech-language clinic, demand evaluation of all necessary aspects of communication or areas you feel your child lacks.

The key to a happy child is... patience and love. When we are patient with small children, it is like giving them the real chance to grow at their pace and at the same time providing them with lots of fun and laughter. Adults also need to love children. They are in our lives so that we could love them with all the positive energy we have got within us, without thinking of profit or loss.

Over the last decade, what has changed for the better in your field - and what's changed for the worse?

Speech-language pathology or therapy has become more of an integral part of treatment programmes for children with special needs all over the region. This

should be rightly so! And the region is more open to speech-language therapy. Another positive change is that not only many parents are aware of the need for speech-language intervention for their children with special needs but they are more willing to learn all the current approaches and techniques used in speech-language therapy.

Among the changes in the field, which I find unfavourable would be that there is a rising number of 'junior' speech therapists working in private practice without adequate supervision. One should have at least four to five years of clinical experience working in at least three clinical settings before moving to private practice.

How do you see things changing over the next ten years?

I am seeing universities in Malaysia, Singapore, India and China providing accredited postgraduate programmes in Speech-language Pathology. Many developing countries are facing the problem of a "graying" population. Thus, more speech-language pathologists are needed to address and intervene in age related communicative and swallowing disorders. UKM has an undergraduate programme and NUS will start its postgraduate programme next year. These are BIG strides in my profession!



Vasu Govindasamy is an American Speech-Language Association (ASHA) certified speech-language pathologist. He specialises in working with adults and children with cognitive-communicative disorders, auditory / language processing deficits, motor speech disorders and hearing impairment. Currently, he runs his own private practice and conducts clinic at Ovspring Development Clinic and Communication for Life in Singapore.