



# Things to Think About!

## WHAT TO EXPECT DURING AN INITIAL SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND FEEDING EVALUATION

By Linda Jorgensen and Kayleen Rodemack M.S.,CCC-SLP

Over the last few months we have received several enquiries about what happens during an initial Speech, Language and Feeding evaluation. Communication disorders are on the rise, many occurring as part of Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder, which leaves many parents facing evaluation visits with a Speech Language Pathologist as part of an overall evaluation for their child. Understanding the process can be a bit confusing.

Have an evaluation coming up soon? Over the years I have participated in a fair number of speech and feeding evaluations for my daughter and I can honestly say it really isn't that bad! Think of your upcoming evaluation as a fact finding mission with the therapist being the Sherlock Holmes of Speech, Language and Feeding (the art of eating without choking). It's the therapist's objective to figure out what your child is doing, physically and cognitively, that both you, the parent, and the therapist can work on to help your child speak, eat and communicate better.

### What to Expect When You Get There

Given the number of questions we've fielded I contacted our favorite Speech-Language Pathologist, Mrs. Kayleen Rodemack, and asked her the same questions. Her reply was simple and to the point.

***"Parents, please remember that you are the authority on your child. Nobody knows your child like you do. Be prepared with your questions, observations and concerns about your child. Ask for activities and things that you can do at home. Most importantly, when helping your child learn a new skill, consistency is very important."***

Parents can expect to answer a large number of questions during the first visit. Mrs. Rodemack included a lengthy list of questions you may be asked about your child and suggests using a notebook to jot down notes, questions and observations you may wish to share with the therapist during your child's evaluation visit.

The following is a general list of questions you may be asked during your visit:

- Does your child have a medical diagnosis? What is it?

- Is your child currently taking medications? If yes; what are they?

Mothers, be prepared to share information about you during this time, as well as medical care you and your child may have received during your pregnancy, labor and immediately after birth.

- Was your child pre-mature? If so, how long was your child in the NICU? Please describe events during your pregnancy, any significant medical events while your child was in the NICU (surgeries, medications, need for oxygen, how was your child fed, etc.).
- If your child was full term, did the child come home from hospital with you?
- How was your child delivered? Were there complications?

### Feeding

- How was your child fed, (i.e. breast fed, bottle fed, NG tube or G-tube)?
- How long did it take your child to eat?
- Did they get fatigued and fall asleep while eating?
- Did you notice liquid loss around the corner's of your child's mouth while feeding?
- Was there any choking or coughing while nursing/drinking liquids?
- When did you child start eating solid foods?
- Did your child have any difficulties such as choking or coughing while feeding?
- When did they start drinking from a cup?
- Were there any difficulties such as choking or coughing while drinking?
- Does your child use a pacifier or suck their thumb/fingers?
- Does your child have any food preferences? Dislikes?
- Are there textures or types of food that your child has a difficult time chewing or swallowing?
- Can your child feed himself?
- Does he/she use a utensil?
- At what age did he/she start to use utensils?
- Does your child have reflux? If yes, how is it being treated?

### Developmental Milestones

Be prepared with developmental milestones, such as:

- Did child hold up his head at 3 months?
- When did your child roll over from tummy to back and back to tummy?

- When did your child sit independently, begin to crawl, stand while holding on to another surface, cruise around furniture, and walk independently?

### Hearing

- Was your child's hearing tested in the Hospital? What were the results?
- Do you feel that your child hears well at home?
- Has your child experienced chronic ear infections? How many?
- Has your child had tubes surgically inserted in his/her ears? When? How many?

### Verbal Language

- Did your child babble? Does your child look at your face while babbling?
- When did your child start using words consistently with intent? i.e.: "dada" was used for Dad and "mama" was used for Mom, etc.
- At what age did your child combine words to communicate i.e.: Go bye-bye?
- Does your child use vocalizations (sounds), gestures or words to communicate?
- Does your child get frustrated when he/she is not understood? What does he/she do when not understood?
- Is your child able to ask or answer questions?
- How does your child express his thought or needs at the present time?
- What do you feel interferes with your child's ability to communicate?
- Is your child able to say all sounds correctly? What sounds are hard for your child to say?
- Do you feel that your child understands what you ask him/her?
- Is he/she able to follow directions? If so, how many steps? Typical 2-step directions such as, "Go get your shoes and bring them to me"?

### Cognitive Development

- Does your child like books? How long will he/she attend to the story?
- Does your child look at the pictures, try to turn the pages or try to mouth the book?
- Do you feel that your child is able to attend to you while you are talking to them?
- Do you need to repeat yourself or re-direct your child more than 50% of the time?
- Can your child watch a program on T.V.? How long to they watch before leaving the room?
- Can your child answer questions about the program he/she just watched?
- Does he/she ask you questions about the show that was just watched?

### Sleep and Play

- Does your child sleep through the night? If not, how many times do you get up at night?
- Why do you feel your child is not able to sleep through the night?
- Does your child like touch when needing to be comforted, or does your voice sooth them?
- When your child is upset, is it difficult to calm them down?
- How would you describe your child's play skills? Is he/she able to use pretend play?
- Is your child around other children? Where and how often?
- Does your child play well with other children?
- Overall how would you describe your child's disposition?

.Kayleen Rodemack M.S.,CCC-SLP  
Speech-Language Pathologist

During an evaluation visit the therapist will be focused on your child. Depending on the child's age, diagnosis and perceived capability the therapist will attempt to engage your child in several different activities meant to assist them in their evaluation. Activities will vary widely but might include playing a simple game, flashcards, and eating foods with several different textures. Infants may be observed drinking from a bottle.

Parents who take the time to follow up with recommended activities, exercises and new skills at home will see better results over time. Consistency is key in helping your child develop new habits. Be sure to ask your child's Speech-Language Pathologist for things you can do at home to help your child succeed.

*Kayleen Rodemack attended Idaho State University where she received a B.S. in Speech Pathology and Audiology, and an M.S. in Speech-Language Pathology. She has been in practice for 22 1/2 years, the majority spent in pediatrics. She has also pursued an education in the areas of Sensory Integration and Neuro-Developmental Treatments (NDT), along with various Autistic Interventions. She has worked in both medical and educational settings. Mrs. Rodemack has worked with children of varying diagnosis but has focused mainly on children exhibiting feeding problems and those diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Mrs. Rodemack currently serves students in an educational setting, K-9th grade.*

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