

# THE CENTER FOR SPEECH EXCELLENCE

## Early Intervention Fact Sheet

**General Information:** Early intervention can be considered those efforts made between conception and approximately 6 years of age. When we look at intelligence, measured at 17 years of age, we find that 50% of that development occurred between conception and age 4. Research shows that the brain is more plastic in the early years and progress can be made with phenomenal success. It is easier to learn a new behavior than to correct an old one.

### Major Premises of Early Intervention

- Early learning sets the pace and lays the groundwork for all learning that follows. If there are gaps and weaknesses, all patterns which come later will have a flawed basis.
- Research supports the idea of critical periods in the early years when children are more susceptible to learning experiences.
- Intelligence and other abilities are not fixed at birth, but are influenced by environment.
- Disabilities/disorders can interfere with subsequent development so that the primary problem left unattended can lead to secondary problems (example: communication problems untreated can lead to low self-esteem).
- Early experiences have a major influence on whether or not a child reaches potential.
- Early intervention programs make a significant difference more rapidly than do remedial efforts after the child enters school.
- Parents need to learn early patterns of providing stimulation and training during the critical years when basic skills should be acquired.
- It will cost less financially and emotionally to engage in prevention or early intervention than in remediation of more serious problems in the older child.

*Adapted from: Early Intervention For Handicapped and At-Risk Children, by Nancy L. Peterson*

### Early Development in Speech and Language

- Two Months: Babies can distinguish their native language from other languages.
- Three Months: Differentiated cry (true vocal communication begins), coos and gurgles, produces single syllables, begins blowing bubbles.
- Three to Six Months: Babies are able to associate a mouth position with the sound made ("o" with the lips rounded). This ability will help the child to learn pronunciation. Babbling begins (double syllables, puts lips together for "m", nasal tone is heard), coos, chuckles, vocally expresses eagerness and displeasure, laughs.

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- Six to Nine Months: Infants have learned to categorize ("ball" refers to a number of different balls, not just one specific one), imitates gestures, understands gestures, looks at common objects or family members when named, comprehends "no," uses "m."
- Seven Months: Babies can detect major phrases and begin sentence interpretation.
- Twelve Months: Before the first words, infants are sorting and grouping the sounds of their native language.
- Thirteen Months: Children recognize action words as well as nouns.
- Two Years: Speech is 65% intelligible, understands 300 words, uses 50 clearly.
- Two and one-half Years: 70% intelligible, understands 500 words, uses 200.
- Three Years: A child is usually able to say 93% of the vowel sounds and 65% of the consonant sounds correctly. By the same age, 50% of a child's speech is grammatically correct.
- Three and one-half to Four Years: Very intelligible, understands 1500-2000 words, uses 1,000-1,500 words.

Dr. Leonard, professor at Purdue University in the Department of Audiology and Speech Sciences, notes that this data serves as a "powerful justification for early intervention."

Conditions that may put infants at a disadvantage for speech and language learning include sensory-neural hearing loss, chronic ear infections, seizures, serious or chronic illness or injury, disordered or delayed development.

Parents of infants and preschoolers can play a large role in the early development of the child. Making good use of the child's time at home, providing and participating in stimulating experiences, and getting professional help as early as possible when problems are apparent will help establish a solid foundation for skills and abilities. If delays are noted with communication, parents should contact a speech-language pathologist, even if the child is an infant.

*Sources: Lawrence B. Leonard, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Audiology and Speech Sciences at Purdue University, writing in ASHA magazine, April, 1991 and Addy Gard, Leslea Gilman, & Jim Gorman, Speech and Language Development Chart.*

## **Assistance**

We can offer the following assistance:

- Evaluation of communication skills in the preverbal and newly verbal child.
- Written report of scores, judgment of age-appropriateness, judgment of readiness and next stage to expect, and a plan for treatment.
- Consult with physician, family, teachers, day care providers, and others.
- Therapy to improve communication skills. Parents may observe and reinforce therapy at home.

*Compiled by Susan E. Hance, M.S., CCC-SLP, © 1992*

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