

Speech Pathology in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services



Please read the Important Notice on the reverse of this Fact Sheet.

A growing number of speech pathologists work within the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). These speech pathologists have a critical responsibility to assist children and adolescents suffering from a mental health illness.

The role of the speech pathologist is central to the process of assessing a child's language and speech capabilities, which in turn is one of the key measures in assessing mental health disorders.

Speech pathologists assist mental health professionals to understand a child's communication skills, communication impairment and developmental level to ensure that appropriate diagnosis and management can proceed.

Who are the children and adolescents being treated by CAMHS?

The children and adolescents involved in CAMHS are aged between 0 – 18 years old.

The majority of them have experienced social and/or emotional difficulties.

Children that come into contact with speech pathologists may have an unidentified communication impairment.

What is a communication impairment?

A communication impairment affects the child's ability to understand others and to be understood themselves. When combined with a mental health illness, it can be a frustrating and lonely experience.

The consequences of communication impairment cross all aspects of child and adolescent development, impacting on families, carers and the broader community.

Common consequences of communication impairment include:

- restricted choice of employment prospects;
- social isolation;
- conflict with family members; and
- problems coping in social situations.

Treatment - When working with a child or adolescent suffering a mental health illness speech pathologists:

- observe 'problem' communication patterns;
- identify influences in the child's life impacting effective communication;
- form a comprehensive picture of the child's communication functioning for a management plan;
- monitor changes in the child's communication functioning; and
- determine eligibility for additional funding or access to special resources.



Once the communication impairment has been identified – what next?

Speech pathologists assist children and adolescents in a number of ways including:

- direct therapy on an individual basis or in a group program;
- advice to carers;
- implementation of a home intervention program;
- case management;
- consultation to educational personnel; and
- group programs for carers.

CAMHS - a highly specialised field

Speech pathologists working with children and adolescents who suffer from a mental illness operate in a specialised area requiring **considerable** training and education. The minimum qualifications to practice as a speech pathologist in CAMHS are:

- degree in speech pathology, or equivalent, from a registered institution;
- eligibility for membership of Speech Pathology Australia; and
- eligibility for registration with the Speech Pathologists' Board (Queensland only)
- experience in pediatrics.

Future directions

The role of the speech pathologist within CAMHS continues to expand as services increasingly appreciate the skills and understanding that speech pathologists bring to the management of children and adolescents.

There are four priorities for the future:

- **Promotion** – of speech pathologists and their work within CAMHS;
- **Early intervention and prevention** – working toward earlier detection of communication impairment and provision of appropriate therapeutic support;
- **Infant mental health** – expand assessment, management and general support services for infants and their care-givers; and
- **Research initiatives** – further explore funding options.

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