



# Learning to speak your mind

by Amanda Perry

ANYONE who struggles to communicate can understand what it is like to feel isolated and frustrated, and Speech Pathology Week, August 23 - 29, is a time to learn more about the difficulties some people face.

This year's theme is 'Communicate to Participate', and resident speech pathologist at Hawkesbury District Health Service, Meagan de Rooy, is raising awareness about how a communication problem can impact day-to-day life.

"We know that communication difficulties can have a major impact on health, wellbeing and quality of life," Ms de Rooy said.

"Being able to communicate helps to connect with people, build friendships and participate in discussions, decisions, social events and work activities."

She said communication difficulties could include problems with speech, hearing, reading, writing, or using and understanding language.

These issues can impact people at any stage of their life.

"Communication difficulties in children are often associated with premature birth, hearing impairment, cerebral palsy and autism. But a person can also develop problems later in life as the result of stroke or degenerative disease," Ms de Rooy said.

"Speech pathologists help to improve a person's speech and language skills. And for those who have more severe disorders, techniques including picture boards, gestures and signing assist them to participate more fully in everyday interactions and activities."

According to Speech Pathology Australia around 2.7 million, or one in seven Australians have communication difficulties.

For many it can result in feelings of grief, anger, frustration and embarrassment; and affect not only the individual but also their families, friends, teachers, and work mates.

If you are concerned about a friend or family member who might have a communication difficulty, encourage them to visit a speech pathologist or make enquiries at their local educational or health service.

For more information on Speech Pathology Week 2009 visit: [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au)

## Tips to help your baby talk

- Talk to your baby often, but make sure you speak slowly, clearly and simply.

- Use a variety of words, not just the names of things.

- Focus on single words, especially words which are commonly used in baby's everyday language, such as nappy, cup, bath.

- Emphasise imitation. As your baby begins to learn new sounds, imitate them. An entire conversation can be built around a few vowels and consonants.

- Pause often so that your baby has the chance to understand and talk back to you.

- Look at your baby's face. Smile or reply to your baby's sounds.

- Create opportunities for your baby to play with other children. Join a play group or toy library.

- Build a repertoire of songs and rhymes.

- Even if baby cannot read or listen to stories, share books with them for a few minutes a day.

### When to seek help:

Speech pathologists work in a variety of settings including schools, health centres, hospitals or private practice.

Your child health nurse may be able to put you in contact with a speech pathologist if you are worried about your child's language development, and particularly if:

- your baby does not seem to listen to you, enjoy sounds or respond to them

- your baby has difficulty sucking, chewing, swallowing or biting

- your baby isn't using real words by 18 months

- your toddler is frustrated by not being able to speak to others

- your toddler has trouble understanding what you say

- your toddler stutters

- your toddler has an unusual voice, for example it sounds husky

- your toddler isn't trying to make sentences by two and a half years.



**Let's talk:** Four-year-old Laura Vella, with speech pathologist Meagan de Rooy, has been having speech therapy since she was two.