



The
Speech, Voice
& Language
Clinic

Mary-Anne Zubrycky, M.A. & Associates
Speech-Language Pathologists

250-B Greenbank Road, Suite 228
Nepean, Ontario K2H 8X4

Tel: (613) 820-4722 Fax: (613) 820-7097

Email: svlc@sympatico.ca

Speech and Language across the Life Cycle

Human development is miraculous and a wonder to behold. The life cycle brings us from an infant who for months is unable to even support the weight of its own head, to a child who often does not leave home until the end of his second decade, to the challenges and losses of a geriatric patient.

The nature of human communication over this cycle is fascinating to a Speech-Language Pathologist. This is true for my colleagues and I who work at the Speech, Voice and Language Clinic. We work with communication disorder across the age spectrum. We also help people of all ages with normal communication to become the best communicators that they can be.

In early infancy an SLP may assess an infant's swallow reflex, orientation to sound, early cooing and visual tracking of an object or person.

In late infancy, babbling, ability to imitate, point, give a requested object, look at a speaker's mouth and vocalize in response to adult speech may be our intervention focus.

In the early toddler years we can evaluate and work on speech sounds, oral motor skills, comprehension of vocabulary and emerging verbal expression.

During the preschool years we often focus on social language, conceptual language and grammar. Other problems we come across are poor language competence related to first language issues, bilingualism or autism.

If children are unable to rhyme and say most of their sounds correctly, by the time they reach kindergarten this can require the work of an SLP in order to ensure good pre-literacy skills and confidence in speaking.

By the age of 7, a child should have mastered all speech sounds. There should also be very few reversals in writing of both numbers and letters. Many parents come to us with concerns about phonological awareness and reading, especially if a child's reading has remained qualitatively unchanged from the middle of first grade to middle of second grade. It is important to differentially diagnose the garden-variety slow reader from the child who may have one of several types of dyslexia.

Early elementary years can involve work on stuttering, verbal expression, reasoning skills and written expression.

In the teen years it is not uncommon to have a client in our office who is embarrassed about stuttering, or anxious about the prospect of having to deliver a classroom speech or an upcoming Bar Mitzvah.

Young adults who visit the Speech, Voice and Language Clinic can present the greatest range of communication problems. These can include, projection difficulties in a new classroom teacher, voice misuse in a singer, someone struggling with stage fright, a recent diagnosis of brain tumor, a traumatic brain injury as a result of a motor vehicle accident, foreign accent, or a young executive who wants to brush up on presentation skills, the executive lunch or the art of dinner conversation.

The middle adult years can sometimes present with challenging disease processes, such as Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and Huntington Disease, which often result in communication and swallowing difficulties.

Late adulthood can also bring to The Speech, Voice and Language Clinic, individuals struggling with hearing loss, learning to lip read, the speech and language consequences of stroke, as well as dementia.

Most of us know people whose lives have been touched by some of the above.

Although a medical practitioner is often the first person to encounter complaints regarding human communication, it is the Speech Language Pathologist who is a valuable resource to physicians, patients and their families. Patients need to be armed with information when these situations arise.

Our work at the Speech, Voice and Language Clinic includes evaluation, program planning, therapy and counseling. In some cases our clinical goals involve cure and complete recovery. At other times we work on strategies, management, coping with an unideal situation, and preparing for decline in the case of degenerative diseases.

No matter what the outcome, our goal is always for the client to reach or maintain her communication potential. But the common thread of working with all individuals, involves skilled problem solving, creative solutions, and finding the joy and triumph however and wherever possible. What makes practising speech pathology at the Speech, Voice and Language Clinic, satisfying, is the connections we share with our patients at either end of the life cycle. We journey along a path to meaningful communication, whether it is emerging communication, or end-of-life care.

Mary-Anne Zubrycky is a registered Speech-Language Pathologist and owner and operator of The Speech, Voice and Language Clinic of Ottawa. She works with a talented team of Registered Speech-Language Pathologists. For more information call 820-4722 or email at svlc@sympatico.ca.

January 2009