

# Speech and Language Disorders

**S**peech and language disorders impact a child's ability to talk, understand, analyse or think about information. There are many different causes of speech and language disorders. Some of these include damage to the brain from an illness or accident, hearing loss, chronic ear infections, autism, down syndrome, cleft palate or cerebral palsy. Surgical treatment for cleft palate (a hole in the roof of the mouth) is available in Fiji and should be sought as early as possible.

With practice, patience and support, children's speech can improve. Many parents find it is tempting to finish children's sentences for them, or just read the child's facial expression. Be patient and allow time for the child to speak even if it is difficult. Speak clearly in front of and to the child – it is important for them to hear good speech.

Do not allow other people to tease a child about their speech difficulties. This can make the child shy or embarrassed to keep trying. Be very supportive and encourage the child's speech. Many children enjoy using sign language at the same time as talking. Pointing to a board with pictures or symbols can help the child communicate to others.

It is important to seek support if you notice that your child is having difficulty with their speech. It is important to check whether a child with speech and language disorders also has hearing loss.

## Some signs of difficulties with speech and language are:

- Unclear speech sounds
- Stuttering
- Limited vocabulary compared to peers
- Difficulty listening or following instructions (may only do the last thing said)
- Often only the parents or caregiver can understand what the child is trying to say
- The child uses non-verbal communication (pointing, facial expressions etc) and the parent becomes very good at anticipating what the child needs.

Sometimes children learning a second language may experience some of these signs. As a general rule, if a child only shows these signs in their second language, but their primary or main language is fine, they are NOT likely to have a speech and language disorder.

**"All schools shall promote fair and equitable access to education for all learners with disabilities regardless of their gender, age, social status, economic background, geographical location, race, ethnicity, religious background, sexual orientation and gender identity, or intersections between these factors."**

(MoE, Special and Inclusive Education Policy)

**"Every person has the right to early childhood education, primary and secondary education and further education."**

(Fiji Constitution)

**Who can help?** Your nearest health centre, the hospital in your division and your community health worker. For hearing tests and additional supports, <https://www.frankhilton.org.fj/> and the <https://www.facebook.com/officialProHeaven/> can assist.

Produced as part of the **Toolkit for Disability-Inclusive Education – Fiji** - Issued June, 2023.  
Please note that this document is for informational/education purposes only and does not replace medical advice.



Ministry of Education

