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# CHILD AND THE LANGUAGE

EFFECTIVE PARENTING WITH REGARD TO DYSLEXIA AND AUTISM

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**MY CHILD IS NOT  
ACQUIRING LANGUAGE  
AT THE IDEAL PACE.  
DOES MY CHILD HAVE  
A LANGUAGE OR  
SPEECH DISORDER?**

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## OVERVIEW



A Brief Guide to  
Dyslexia & Autism



Parenting Tips,  
Am I Doing this Right?



Bilingual Education,  
Is it Suitable?

# Hi parents!

## THIS GUIDE BOOKLET

intends to serve as a general reference to all you parents out there who might require a little clarification on the specific language and speech impacts of two major developmental disorders, Dyslexia and Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Both of the disorders mentioned and explored in this booklet are disorders which are spectrum-based and therefore have varying degrees or classifications even within their own disorder classes. This booklet only provides a general view on the disorders and is in no way or form entirely representative of every child out there.

While it is definitely our goal to provide a clear and all-rounded outlook on the topic, there will be things that we have missed out in the process, little differences and exceptions which may not be similar to what we have stipulated in this booklet. Please do pardon us for these and we hope that this booklet has helped you in achieving a better understanding of these disorders and your little ones.

*With Well Wishes,*

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We all hear of the “ideal” development rate for children, and it is most definitely not unusual for parents to be asking questions about their children’s speed of learning as well as accuracy of learning milestones.

The figure on the lower right shows key speech milestones for a typical developing child before official enrolment in school.

While language disorders are not always the cause behind delayed language acquisition rates, it is to note that they are not entirely a factor unworthy of worry either.

According to understood.org (2017), one of the well-known parenting network websites in the States, as much as 5% of the school-age children are believed to have language disorders in just the US alone, thus making language disorders one of the more common childhood disorders for children.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are also what we call speech disorders. It is important for parents to be able to differentiate between the two types so that they can help their children better.

A trend observed in Singapore suggested a drastic increase of 76 percent in the number of preschool children diagnosed with language and speech developmental issues (2,500 in 2010 and 4,400 in 2014).

Data collected through diagnoses from KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital and the National University Hospital

## SO WHAT EXACTLY ARE LANGUAGE AND SPEECH DISORDERS?

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2017), speech and language disorders can be classified based on the following characteristics:

### Speech Disorder

- difficulties in production of accurate or fluent speech sounds
- problems with voice (e.g. projection)

Examples:

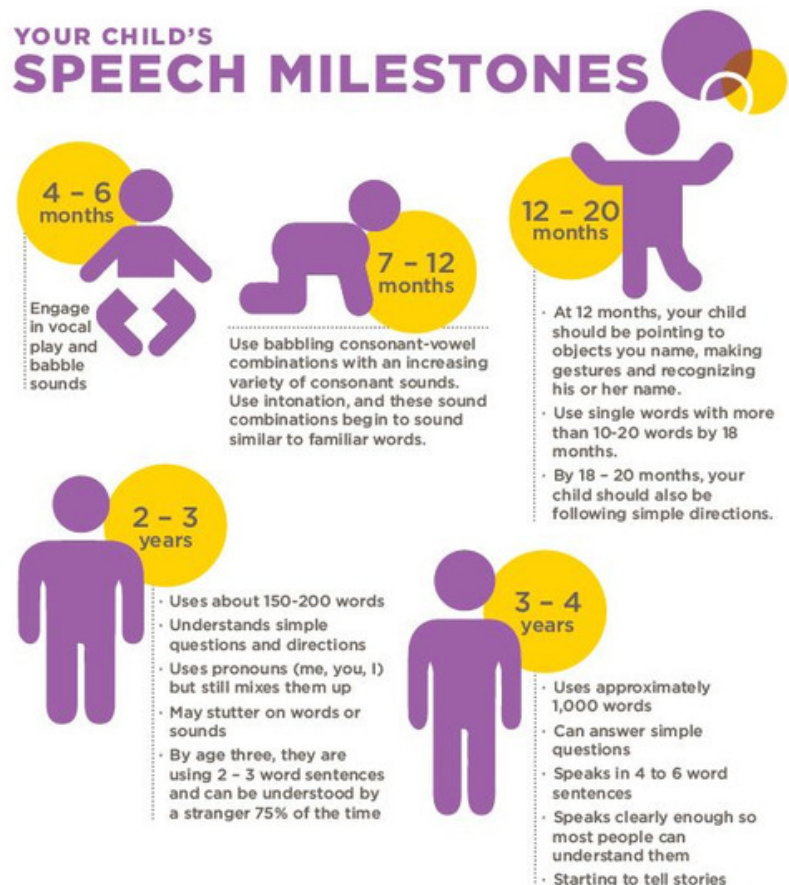
- Difficulties pronouncing sounds
- Articulation disorders
- Stuttering

### Language Disorder

- difficulty in understanding others
- difficulty in expressing themselves

Examples:

- Aphasia



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## AUTISM, WHAT EXACTLY IS IT?

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Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), better collectively known as Autism, are a range of development disorders.

According to the Institute of Mental Health Singapore (2012), general behaviour characteristic of ASD includes difficulties in expressing social engagement and communication as well as fixation or a repetitive pattern in terms of interests and behaviour.

As of 2016, it has been identified that one in every 150 children in Singapore is diagnosed with Autism, a situation that is definitely alarming as it is higher than that of the World Health Organisation (one in 160).

## AS A PARENT, HOW CAN I HELP WITH MY CHILD'S LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS?

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As mentioned, children diagnosed with ASD can often display difficulties in social situations. In the specific context of language, this could largely be due to a lack of speech, which can be resultant of learning difficulties or just a lack of social familiarity in general.

For speech problems impacted by learning difficulties, there may be a need for parents to enrol the child in speech therapy.

Other than speech therapy, social skills training can also be beneficial in helping to improve the child's tolerance and familiarity with social interactions. While speech therapy has to be implemented by trained professionals, social skills training is one area in which the parents can help and in fact, with increased effectiveness due to familiarity and comfort. There are different ways in which the parents can go about the training, depending on which is suitable for their child's personality.



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1 IN EVERY

**150** LOCAL  
CHILDREN

IS DIAGNOSED WITH AUTISM



## PROFESSIONAL SPEECH THERAPY

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In the process of speech therapy, your child may undergo therapy in specific language fields such as spoken word recognition and lexical processing, both of which are possible areas of impact identified through previous studies in the field, as well as general areas such as attention span.

A study by Haebig et al. (2015) has identified a subsequent limited development (in comparison with typically developing children) in terms of use of **vocabulary and contextual knowledge** upon initial early delays in language for children diagnosed with autism. Particularly, children with ASD exhibit partial or superficial word knowledge in addition to poorer understanding of relations between words. Therefore, therapy can largely be focused on the development and training of soft skills as such.

## IN-HOME PARENTAL HELP

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A possible way would be through **video modeling**, a time-efficient platform with proven effectiveness for teaching of skills such as self-help, social and academic skills.

Besler & Kurt (2016) has highlighted the simplicity and up-to-par effectiveness of mother-provided video modeling (as compared to video modeling provided by researchers).

Parents can record a video of themselves carrying out an action (e.g. building a toy train using lego bricks) and accompany the children in the **familiarisation and acquisition** process without the need for constant repetition and demonstration, a plus point which can prove to be beneficial especially for the working parents.

**Role-playing** can also help keep children interested while familiarising them with the various norms and social situations.

## DYSLEXIA, WHAT EXACTLY IS IT?

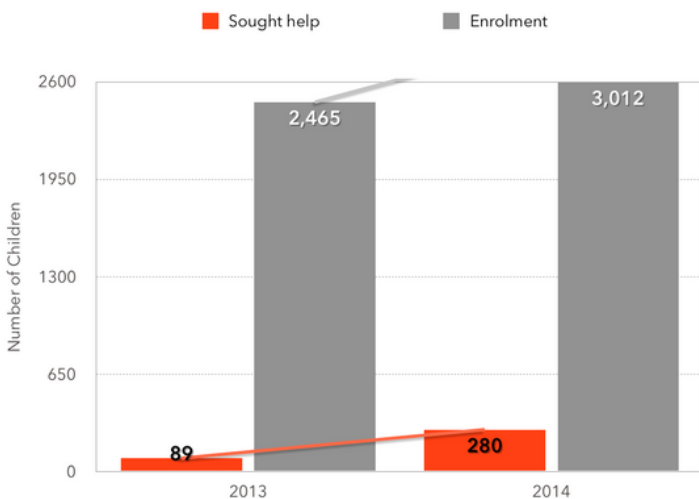
Dyslexia is a term that many of us may find familiar, be it having heard it from people or just having chanced upon it. However, what exactly is dyslexia?

According to the Dyslexic Association of Singapore (2017), dyslexia is a learning difficulty characteristic of language learning and cognition. As an overview, dyslexia primarily affects the accuracy and fluency of spoken and written language production.

As we can see from the chart below, there is a rising trend in the number of children diagnosed with dyslexia in Singapore.

There is, therefore, a pressing need for us to address this issue of dyslexia and most importantly, to spread awareness.

In this case, how can parents of dyslexic children help their kids in acquiring language?



**ESTIMATIONS MADE FROM GLOBAL FIGURES INDICATE THAT 4 PERCENT OF EACH COHORT OF STUDENTS ARE IN FACT DYSLEXIC WITH A SEVERITY LEVEL ENOUGH TO WARRANT INTERVENTION**

*Mr. Lee Siang,  
Chief Executive Officer  
Dyslexic Association of Singapore*

## AS A PARENT, HOW CAN I HELP WITH MY CHILD'S LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS?

Regardless of which language you are intending to let your child learn, you have to understand that acquisition is usually at a slower pace for a dyslexic child. Parents must always be **patient** when communicating or educating the child, so as to reduce the amount of pressure and anxiety the child might feel when they are unable to pick up a particular word at first try. Let them know, that is normal for that to happen and with more practice, they would naturally improve.

If possible, it will most definitely be helpful for the child to be exposed to **professional intervention**. The Dyslexic Association of Singapore (DAS) offers programmes which are meant to aid the child in general skills such as reading (for the younger children) as well as academic-based learning and curricula (for children of schooling ages).

Younger children may find it difficult or uncomfortable to have therapy with an unfamiliar adult clinician or therapist. In this case, **constant exposure to quality reading** with the company of the parents at home can also help the child in the development of their reading skills under comfortable supervision.

## BILINGUALISM, WHAT EXACTLY IS IT?

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There are different types of bilingualism depending on the types and degree of exposure a child receives.

In our current globalising world, it is no longer an uncommon phenomena for people to know and be fluent in more than one language. A lot of people are moving on to acquire at least two languages of communication, joining the transition from a monolingual to a bilingual or even a multilingual individual.

With the increasing competitive advantage knowing more languages would hold, parents are also looking to equip their children with the literacy weapon we call languages, and of course, 'the more the better' also applies in this case, especially with a sensitivity window for children in language acquisition.

However, would bilingual acquisition help a child with language disorders? Would knowing more than one language help the child, or would it restrict them?



**BILINGUALISM IS BROADLY DEFINED AS  
THE USE OF AT LEAST TWO LANGUAGES BY  
AN INDIVIDUAL**

*ASHA (2004)  
on the definition of Bilingualism*

## WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU MEAN BY BILINGUALS IN SINGAPORE?

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If we were to specify bilingualism in Singaporean terms, our education system for the children is the perfect example of bilingualism.

In Singapore, the Ministry of Education has designated the learning of at least two languages, English and a Mother Tongue, as the compulsory course of language education for our children upon entry into Primary School education. All the students (with occasional exceptions) are required to take on English as well their mother tongue language as examinable subjects and are required to go through academic classes.

While this bilingual policy was only actively promoted for children in Primary Schools and onwards, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has identified the development of bilingualism in preschools as a key area of concern in his National Day Rally for 2017.



### **IS BILINGUALISM RECOMMENDED FOR DYSLEXIC AND AUTISTIC CHILDREN?**




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There is a common misconception out there that exposure to multiple languages all at once may be detrimental to a dyslexic or autistic child's language development process.

However, studies have shown that there are no significant differences in the language development process for young monolinguals and bilinguals diagnosed with language disorders. In fact, bilingualism can be useful for children in the long run for bilingual communities and societies due to familiarity by exposure.

## LIST OF USEFUL CONTACTS

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It is important that parents are aware of the presence of professional help that they can engage. Raising a child is always stressful and requires a lot of patience, even more so for children who needs an extra helping hand in kickstarting their development.

When in doubt, always check with a professional regarding the optimal course of action which can help your child further.

Here are some organisations which may be of help to you.

- Dyslexic Association of Singapore +65 6444 5700
- Speech and Language Therapy Singapore
- Autism Resource Centre (Singapore) +65 6323 3258
- Child Guidance Clinic By Appointment & Referral Basis
- Neuro-Behavioural Clinic





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