

Two Speech & Language Therapists have launched the world's first online Speech Therapy Club in order to address the language delay of thousands of pre-school children.

Some good news!

Two Paediatric Speech & Language Therapists, with over 50 years of experience, have launched the world's first online Speech Therapy Club to address the global crisis that is affecting pre-schoolers all round the world in the hope of helping this generation to start talking.

With an estimated 1.5 million children (ICAN*), whose speech development has been negatively affected by lockdown, demand for speech therapists is at an all-time high. Many worried parents are looking at well over a year for their child to be seen for even an initial speech & language assessment.

Claire Heslop & Claire Whittaker, two Speech and Language Therapists (who are both mothers themselves), have teamed up to create a new service that is revolutionising the world of speech therapy and helping children to start talking.

Speech Club is an online service which allows families to access immediate speech and language therapy in their homes. Families no longer have to wait, and instead can watch online pre-recorded lessons, download manuals, handouts, illustrations and everything they need in order to develop their child's speech and language. Members of the club also become part of a specific online community where they get the chance to interact personally with the therapists and can share support and advice with each other. Monthly live Q & A's have become invaluable to families around the UK and, following numerous positive testimonials, the therapists are now launching this service globally.

Claire Whittaker said: "After the first lockdown my work phone did not stop ringing with parents distressed and frustrated that they couldn't get the help they needed. Their children were not learning to talk as they were not able to interact with others and this, coupled with mask wearing, meant that their communication skills were so limited. We became aware that there was a generation emerging of pre-school children who were unable to talk and whose parents had nowhere to turn."

Claire Heslop posed the following question: "How can we get speech therapy to the children in need?" The therapists had so much experience and knew what would work and how to help these children if only they could reach them, but with the sheer numbers of children requiring help it meant this was not physically possible. Children were now used to online learning so perhaps they could pre-record lessons? Could the children watch the speech therapist on their phone or tablet? Before they knew it...Speech Club began to emerge....

Felicity, a mother, and member of Speech Club said: "The course is simple to access, easy to follow, and provides all of the activities, resources and videos for you to work on together. We feel empowered in the knowledge that we are using professional-standard tools to help our son and after only three weeks we (and others) have noticed a difference. His verbal communication has improved, he is making new sounds and he is showing more confidence in using words with meaning and purpose."

At a cost of less than £1 a day, this is providing a solution to thousands of families who are currently in need. It is widely recognised that since the pandemic, the NHS Speech and Language Therapy waiting lists are unacceptable. Perhaps this is offering a solution?

*"OH's report, 'Opening up for the Covid generation' nearly 1.5 million children are struggling to be able to speak and to understand what other people are saying to them as a result of not being able to speak or understand language at an age appropriate level" <https://oh.org.uk/opening-up-for-the-covid-generation/>

Additional reference to the UK's speech problem:

According to a study by the Royal College of Speech Therapists (RCSLT Jan 2022 Titled "The sustained impact of COVID-19 on Speech and Language therapy services in the UK (rcslt.org)": "More than three quarters (77.1%) of Speech therapists reported that the demand on their service had increased since before the pandemic, with over a quarter of these (28.6%) indicating that the demand 'had at least doubled'." and that "over three quarters of respondents indicated that demand on their services had increased since the onset of COVID-19 in the UK, with a substantial proportion of these specifying that it had at least doubled."

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5 Top tips to get your child talking:

Remember to make sure your child NEEDS to talk

Don't just assume what your child wants to eat or wants to play with. Get them to *ask* for what they want. They need to recognise the power of speech so that when they start talking, they can influence the world around them.

Make a photo album of your child doing simple actions

For instance take a photo of them swimming, running, sitting, clapping etc. They will have great fun looking at themselves in the photos and telling you what they were doing.

Comment on what your child is doing and add a word

Try to narrate what your child is doing so that they have the opportunity to learn the language that accompanies their actions. For example, if they are playing with the cars, say "Look at the cars, the cars are going down the slope. The car is very fast" etc When your child does say a word, repeat it back but add a further piece of information. For example, if your child says "car", you can say "yes big car".

Do not worry if the first words are not very clear but if you realise they always use the same word for an object then treat it as if it is a clear word

Repeat these words back to your child so they hear a good clear model of the word. For instance, if your child says "Joo" (for juice) you then say "Yes juice" as you hand it to them.

Start with teaching your child words that cause an immediate event

Two easy words to start with are "more" and "go". For example, if you are on the slide in the playground encourage your child to wait at the top of the slide and say "Ready, steady.....". They can only come down the slide when they say "Go". When they are on the swing hold the seat up in the air and say "Ready, steady"and only release the swing when they say "Go". If they are enjoying an activity encourage them to say "more" before continuing.