

To contact a free speech pathology service near you, contact your local hospital or community health centre. People in the Canterbury area can call (02) 9740 7555.



English
[BHC-4965]

**Does someone you know need a
speech pathologist?**

NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service
Website: <http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>
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Does someone you know need a speech pathologist?

Mai couldn't understand what was wrong with her four year-old son Van. Sometimes when she asked him questions like "Where's your sock' or where's your teddy bear," he'd answer "Mummy". Although he was co-operative in other ways, he often ignored her when she asked him repeatedly to do things. Yet Mai knew there was nothing wrong with his hearing because tests had shown it was normal. Often Mai couldn't understand what Van was saying when he asked for things - he'd mumble something - and throw a tantrum if his mother didn't understand. No wonder both Mai and Van were becoming increasingly frustrated.

Mai's doctor suggested she see a speech pathologist at the local community health centre, who explained that Van wasn't being deliberately disobedient - he had a communication disorder which meant he had difficulty understanding the use of some words and sentences. This disorder is one of many speech and communication problems in children and adults which speech pathologists can treat. These include:

- People who have difficulty talking or understanding (or even swallowing) after a stroke.
- Young children who aren't speaking or understanding as much as you would expect for their age. Children who talk very little, use only short sentences or who leave out words, use the wrong words or put them in the wrong order. Children who - like Van - have difficulty following directions or who only follow instructions after seeing how other children carry them out.
- Children or adults who are difficult to understand, who say some words incorrectly or leave some sounds out of words, or leave out the ends of words; children or adults who stutter.

- Children or adults whose voices sound unusual - they may sound like they always have a cold, for instance, or may lose their voice frequently, or speak with a higher or lower pitch than normal.

"Seventy to 80 per cent of the time the cause of these problems is unknown," explains Vandana Sarathy, the speech pathology co-ordinator at Canterbury Community Health Centre. "Sometimes it's a physical problem like cleft palate, cerebral palsy or a facial deformity. It may be a problem with hearing or seeing, with the child's slow development, or even because of a lack of language stimulation at home. But whatever the problem, it's important to get treatment as soon as possible - don't just assume children will 'grow out of it'. It's best if problems are picked up before children start school," she adds. If children have difficulty learning their first language, for instance, there's a good chance they'll also have difficulty with English."

The first five years of life are very important for the development of children's speech and language skills. Parents can help by talking to children as much as possible, even when they're still babies, and by reading and singing to them. Mixing with other children at playgroup or pre-school helps too. So does providing children with varied experiences such as outings - this gives you different things to talk about.

For parents who don't speak English fluently, Vandana recommends talking to children in their first language rather than in broken English. "It's better for children to learn their first language really well at home, and pick up English outside the home," she says.