Factsheet: Glue Ear

My Child Has Glue Ear... How Will this Affect Their Talking?

If you put your fingers in your ears, this is what the world sounds like to your child – everything is muffled. This makes it difficult to hear what is happening around you and so it is harder to listen and join in with conversations.

Your child might look as if they are 'switched off' or ignoring you if they can't see that you're trying to talk to them. They might find it particularly hard to listen when it is noisy, for example, at nursery, in the park or out and about with traffic noise.

Your child might not hear some words properly. If your child isn't hearing some sounds they will find it tricky to learn new sounds and words.

Sometimes children prefer to play on their own as this is easier than trying to join in with other children. This means that they can miss out on making friends and playing with them. They might also say things that seem odd or at the wrong time because they have misheard the conversation or don't know when to join in. Your child may be less confident talking and getting on with other people.

It also takes a lot of effort to concentrate on listening when you have glue ear, so they might get tired or distracted easily. This may also affect their behaviour

If your child has glue ear for a long time and it isn't treated then they may find it harder to move on with their talking than other children. They might need some help for them to develop their language.

What can I do at home to help?

There are lots of things you can try that have been shown to help:

- Reduce any background noise - e.g. turn off the TV when you are playing or having a conversation. Any background noise makes it harder for your child to hear conversations and listen to what is going on around them.

- Make sure you are sitting face to face or where you child can see you easily. This lets them see your face so they can get lots of clues about what you are saying from the way your lips move and where you are looking.

- Try to get your child's attention when you want to talk to them by calling their name. If they don't respond to you, repeat it. If they don't respond say their name again and touch them gently. This lets them know you are trying to talk to them and helps them to focus on you.

- Join your child in pretend play. Let them take the lead. This will help their language and creativity. Talk about what they are saying and doing rather than asking lots of questions. This helps their language skills and shows you are listening and interested.
- Have some special time with your child each day to play with toys and picture books. This can help your child to feel listened to. It can also help you tune in to what your child is saying and how they communicate with you.

- Slowing down your speech can give your child time to tune into what you are saying.

- If your child says something in the wrong way, repeat it back the right way instead of correcting them. If your child says 'dat a lil tat' you can say 'yes, that's a little cat'. Children learn speech sounds gradually.

- Give your child lots of clues about what you want them to do, if they are finding it hard to listen and understand. You could use your hands to gesture or draw pictures to help them.

- Break down what you want them to do into small steps. Instead of saying 'tea's ready...but before you come in can you put your toys away and wash your hands' say 'toys away' then 'wash your hands, tea's ready'. This will help your child to follow one instruction at a time.

- Give your child lots of time to listen and think about what they want to say. This will help them to listen and understand what you've said and then join in the conversation.

- Make sure that you speak to your child's school or nursery so that they know. They may need to make sure that your child is sitting at the front during group times so that they don't miss what's happening. You can also share the strategies you are using with them.

You can find more tips and advice on helping your child to listen and talk on the *Talking Point* website - talkingpoint.org.uk.

What will happen if it doesn't clear up?

Talk to your GP or Health Visitor about the next steps if you're not sure.

Some children may need an operation to put grommets in their ear drums. Grommets are small plastic tubes that look a bit like polo mints. The hole in the middle stops the fluid in the ear building up so they can hear what is going on around them. However, new treatments are being researched all the time.

A speech and language therapist can also support you to help your child's talking.

Why and when do I need to see a speech and language therapist?

A speech and language therapist will be able to see how your child is doing and give you some tips and advice to help you with your child's talking at home.

You can refer yourself to the speech and language therapist, you don't need to see your GP. You can find out how to get in touch with your local speech and language therapy service at the website: talkingpoint.org.uk. Click on the box on the right hand side that says 'Find local services'.

For more information please visit the following websites:

ndcs.org.uk/family_support/glue_ear

nhs.uk/conditions/Glue-ear/

talkingpoint.org.uk

deafnessresearch.org.uk

afasicengland.org.uk/publications/glossary-sheets/