

# Components Necessary for Speech and Language Skills

## What is Speech?

*Speech* refers to the sounds that come out of our mouth and take the shape in the form of words. The speech process is very complex. There are many prerequisites in order for a child to speak:

- There must be a desire to communicate.
- The brain must have previously heard and learned words in other contexts.
- The brain needs to create an idea it wants to communicate to another person.
- The brain must then send that idea to the mouth.
- The brain then tells the mouth which words to say and which sounds make up those words. In addition, intonation patterns and accented syllables must be incorporated.

## What is Language?

*Language* refers to the content of what is spoken, written, read, or understood. Language can also be gestural. The three categories of language are: *receptive*, *expressive*, and *social*. The ability to comprehend someone else's speech or gestures is called *receptive language*. The ability to create a spoken message that others will understand is called *expressive language*. The way in which language is used with others is called *pragmatics (social language)*. In order for children to understand and use spoken language in a meaningful way, these things must happen:

- Their ears must hear well enough for the child to distinguish one word from another.
- Someone must demonstrate, or model, what words mean and how sentences are put together.
- The ears must hear intonation patterns, accents, and sentence patterns.
- The brain must have enough intellectual capability to process what those words and sentences mean.

## What is Listening?

*Listening* is an active process of hearing and comprehending what is said. As with speech, several steps need to occur for a child to listen to speech:

- The child must attend to the speech signal.
- Sound waves must carry the spoken words to his/her ears.
- The sound must travel through the outer ear canals without obstruction.
- The sound must then pass through the eardrum and the middle ear without being distorted by fluid from colds, infection, or allergies.
- It must then travel through the inner ear, which must be functioning properly as well.
- This sound must travel via the auditory nerve to the brain.
- The brain must try to compare what it hears to previously stored sounds and words to make sense of the message.
- The brain must take in visual information (example: lip movements, facial expressions).
- The brain must hold on to the information long enough in order to process it.