

Talking Is Hard for Me: Encouraging Communication in Children with Speech-Language Difficulties

Linda M. Reinert

Emily S. Lynch, Illustrator

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This multilayered guide lets parents and caregivers team up with children to help them communicate.

Linda Reinert and Emily Lynch team up to create a marriage of children's storybook combined with instructional manual for professionals and family caregivers of children with speech-language difficulties. Designed to connect with multiple audiences, *Talking Is Hard for Me* portrays the internal experience of speech-challenged children while eliciting empathy and understanding in family members and professionals who work with children.

On its simplest level, *Talking Is Hard for Me* is a series of vignettes of first-person narration from speech-challenged kids. Each child tells the story of his or her experience communicating with others; this typically involves a need that the child has (wanting a refill on a glass of milk, for instance) and a family member's response to that need. The children use hand gestures, attempts at spoken word, and alternate forms of communication as they stretch themselves to convey their needs and desires. A broad spectrum of outcomes is experienced by these children; some are satisfied while others are frustrated by the responses they receive from family and teachers. No fairy tale, this storyline likely mirrors the real-world experiences of speech-challenged children.

A layer of complexity is added with the "Talk to the Child" sections in the sidebar. These tidbits provide additional commentary that the adult reader can offer the child ("This little girl does not need to talk because all the big people in her life know what she is thinking. But maybe she wants to talk. ...What do you think? Do you think she would like to talk sometimes?")

In addition, these sections relate to what is likely the book's most complex and helpful feature—"Tips and Techniques." It's here that the adult caregiver engages with real-life strategies for fostering communication with children, as well as in-depth rationales for various techniques, such as waiting for the child to make an effort at communication before they receive assistance ("It may seem cruel to require the child to speak when the chances of success are almost zero. ... Still, we all do want the child to talk eventually.")

From a caregiving and professional perspective, the content seems perfectly accessible. However, the authors do employ language in the story itself that may not be entirely understood to younger audiences, such as when a child says her family and teachers use "*augmentative*" and "*alternative communication*, or AAC for short," and another child states, "My words are not perfect and sometimes they sound more like *vowels*" (*italics added*). These concepts are likely to fly over the head of most preschoolers, regardless of speech-language difficulties.

However, this shortcoming is entirely forgivable given that the author and illustrator have engineered a product that is easy to read, pleasant to view, and packed with guidance for adults who wish to help a speech-challenged child.

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