**Allie Speech**

**Delphine:** [00:00:00] Welcome back to the access to education podcast, where we talk about everything having to do with learning challenges and learning disabilities. Today on the show. We're talking about speech therapy. My guest today is Allie, a speech language pathologist who works in the West end of Toronto. Allie

works with children from preschool to adolescents who struggle with communication.

She supports families in learning and understanding social

communication, articulation,

motor speech, and language difficulties. Allie works with children

who have

exceptionalities, such as ADHD, ASD. And, or a stutter through one on one sessions and group work. She supports both children and families in better understanding how to communicate.

Ali welcome to

the show. Thank you so much for having me on your podcast. Thank you.

Quite excited about talking about speech therapy, because before I had kids with exceptionalities, I thought speech therapy only had to do with learning how to talk. , I learned a lot through my own kids, so I'm excited to have you on to share your expertise.

**Allie:** [00:01:07] Yes, you are not alone in thinking that is our job, but , As we'll talk about this a lot more to the profession that's for sure.

**Delphine:** [00:01:15] So let's start at the very bare bone basics. Can you explain a bit more about what speech language pathology is and how it can help families and what it is that you do outside of learning, how to articulate

for you?

**Allie:** [00:01:29] Absolutely. So speech pathologists, like I said, can wear many hats, which is one of the main reasons why I love the profession so much. So yeah. What's so awesome about speech pathology is that we work with people of all ages from birth to, people in their eighties and their nineties. we can work with.

, babies who are having difficulty with feeding or infants who are late talkers or children, having difficulty being understood because of some speech sound difficulties. We work with children on grammar and sentence structure and literacy and writing, and also social communication and stuttering.

There's a ton that we do. I personally work with , preschool and school-age children who stutter one job. And at my other job, I work with children and teens on social communication skills and , also language and articulation skills. So I do a lot of different things , at both my jobs.

**Delphine:** [00:02:26] Okay. So you just said something that made me think you work with kids from birth.

**Allie:** [00:02:31] Yeah, so I don't personally, but speech pathologists do. , there are speech pathologists that work in the NICU, for example, at sick kids hospital, , for tons of different things like cleft palate and cleft lip, who are children, , babies who are having difficulty with feeding.

So really from birth, there are speech pathologists actually in the NICU.

Wow. Okay. So

**Delphine:** [00:02:54] that expands the scope of work. Beyond what I had envisioned

it. Exactly. And we also work because , feeding and swallowing is all with the same anatomy of talking. We also work with elderly people.

Who've had a stroke or a brain injury , on both their communication skills, but also their swallowing. So that's another big part of the job. Interesting. Yeah, let's see. I

learned something.

**Allie:** [00:03:20] I know deceiving when it's a speech language therapist it's missing a lot in the title I find,

**Delphine:** [00:03:26] Yeah. Agree For sure. So let's dive into a little bit more of what. Access to education talks about in terms of learning disabilities. And one of the things I like to try and, get information out about is how parents can first maybe identify that there's an issue, right? It's hard to know. And you hemmed and hawed as a parent have certainly been there, but let's talk about what are some of the early warning signs that your child or a child might be struggling with.

Language difficulties, whether it's the actual speech in terms of the age, in which they speak, or maybe some other sort of social communication that they haven't quite figured out yet.

**Allie:** [00:04:09] Yeah, absolutely. So obviously all children are different and the speech and language skills, will develop at a different rate.

Even , the norms that are out there can vary a lot in terms of the norms that I generally follow. I'll split it up into language, social and speech. So in terms of language, generally, I have a child that's 18 months or so old should have about 50. Words in his or her vocabulary. So when a child has around 50 words, that's when they also start putting two words together.

So like saying more bottle, for example. And then by two years old, they should have her own two to 300 words. If that's not the case or our child's very far behind that, I would probably seek a speech pathologist service. So that's language , in terms of speech. So the clarity of a child's talking , an unfamiliar listener should understand 50% of what a two year old says and 75% of what a three-year-old says.

Obviously there's a lot of variability, but if a child's three and make, like a stranger could not understand what they were saying, I would seek a speech pathologist. And then in terms of social. Babies, they really do start engaging with people around six to nine months, ish. Eye contact, smiling, babbling, back and forth , eventually requesting things from an adult point, pointing, reaching, making a sound.

If you're not seeing that engagement with another adult or another person , that I would definitely seek. Speech pathology in that case. So you can see from early on if a child is having difficulties with social communication, really as early as, six to nine months. So it's earlier than you might think, but it's something that, to keep your eye open for.

When you have a baby, for sure.

**Delphine:** [00:06:03] If a parent. Has the child who's maybe not reaching one of those milestones. What are some things that they can do? Is there anything, that they could do at home that can help to bring that language along?

**Allie:** [00:06:16] Absolutely. So in a young child, so nine months to, 18 months, there's a lot of different things you can do.

For example, giving the child a reason to communicate. So oftentimes parents. They're so good at anticipating their child's needs that they know this point or this grunt, or this sound means I want my bottle and this one means I'm I need to be changed. , parents are really good at anticipating their child's needs, but sometimes just giving them a reason to communicate.

So putting something out of reach of a child, putting things in a container that they can't open , so that the child has to have a reason to ask for help or to ask for assistance. That's a really big one. and then another big tip I often give parents is to take what your child says or is trying to say and expand upon it.

So if a child says more, you could say, Oh, you want more juice? If a child says. Fall down, you can say, Oh, you fell down and you hurt your head. So just taking what they say and expanding upon it or taking what they say and seeing it, how they would if they could. So if that means pointing to the shoe, but not saying anything you could say, Oh, the shoe let's put your shoe on.

So really just saying what they would say if they could and expanding upon that.

**Delphine:** [00:07:34] Okay, so that totally

makes sense for say kids between say, I don't know, 12 months and 12 months is probably a little bit young, but 12 to maybe three or four.

**Allie:** [00:07:44] Yeah.

**Delphine:** [00:07:45] But what happens when you get a ten-year-old like that?

I don't know that I could see that working with a ten-year-old. So I guess my question is how can you do the same thing, but get the buy-in from a ten-year-old.

**Allie:** [00:07:56] In terms of the goals of a ten-year-old, it obviously depends , generally at that age, and I'm thinking just more about my clients.

So I don't like, this is very general to my clients. I work a lot on. Story retail and personal narratives and being specific with your language and talking about , what you did during the day, but not saying this and that and the stuff and the thing. So whether that's with , sometimes I'll use a visuals, so I'll actually have pictures of things you might do in the day to make it a bit easier to come up with the words , Also making sure that you're picking topics that are relevant to a ten-year-old.

So if a ten-year-old loves Minecraft or roadblocks makeup, may have them make a personal narrative or a story about, about a video game or reading a book. If a child really likes, frozen. Do a story retail from a frozen book. So it really depends on the goals. But in terms of an older child, those are generally my goals when it comes to language.

Obviously things are very different for social, for articulation, but , that's what pops into my brain when it comes to language skills.

Yeah, for sure. So just enriching language through everyday activities that can allow for them to grow with the parent.

Absolutely.

**Delphine:** [00:09:12] Okay.

So that's , I would say a fair dive into the speech side,

but I think

the part that I really want to try and talk about today is really about the social communication part, because I think that's a bit of a

missed piece maybe,

In terms of being able to understand how that all fits together and what it looks like.

**Allie:** [00:09:35] I wonder if you can talk a little

**Delphine:** [00:09:36] bit about how your work and the work of your colleagues plays into social communication and how that's all tied in.

**Allie:** [00:09:48] Yes, that's a great question. And one that I get very often, and to be honest, until I started working where I work now, to me, social communication was.

Not something that we really learned much about in school. So as a speech pathologist, the goal is to help people to communicate. So if a child has, excellent language and can talk about dinosaurs for hours and hours with fantastic sentence structure and great grammar and really awesome vocabulary, that's great.

But if they talk about it for hours and use this amazing language, does somebody want to hear about it for hours? Probably not. What we do is we help children to actually use their language skills and their ability to communicate with other people in more of an appropriate or expected way.

So a huge part of social communication is understanding some of those subtle nuances of social environments, like reading body language, reading, understanding, tone of voice and facial expression , and other people, but also recognizing how your. Nonverbal communication skills, like body language, tone of voice, facial expression, impact other people.

How to teach a child how their behaviors and their actions impact people's thoughts and feelings about them. So if I act in X way, people are going to have a thought about me and a feeling about me, depending on how I act. I also work with children on how to make friends, how to join a group, how to maintain positive friendships.

What does it actually mean to be a friend? What's the difference between a friend versus someone who's maybe, not really treating us so well, and we don't really realize that. So it's really helping children ultimately to use their communication skills with other people , to have more positive interactions with their peers.

That's usually the ultimate goal.

**Delphine:** [00:11:44] Okay. And I get the sense and my kid's exceptionalities are fairly benign in terms of, what's happening and they are where they are and one is, has more social challenges than the other.

But I could see how

being able to understand those social cues.

When you're talking about cause of the exceptionalities, it's really difficult and it doesn't really matter what the exceptionality is because most of our kids with exceptionalities have some sort of social communication issue in terms of, they don't always get the, or they take the joke too far or they don't get the joke or, they want to be in the joke, but they're part of the joke, but they don't realize it.

It's those sorts of things.

**Allie:** [00:12:23] Yeah. So it's those taking things that sometimes are implicit like you, and I would maybe pick up on it pretty quickly, I don't run around in class because it's a rule. It's a hidden rule that I'm not supposed to run around in class. So it's taking those really implicit rules and norms, and sometimes just making them more explicit to a child and really teaching them explicitly so they could actually understand it.

And it's not so hidden anymore. That's one of the big goals.

**Delphine:** [00:12:53] Which I think for a lot of us, parents of kids with learning challenges, whatever the exceptionality is, I think that's the biggest struggle is, feeling like your kid is left out, for example, which might one of my kids often is because of his inability to always read the room.

Which is a skill, as adults, those of us. Who've figured it out, we do. Okay. Cause we get it, but if you don't get , it is really difficult and can be really isolating.

**Allie:** [00:13:20] Exactly. And I think a huge part of that is, like you said, reading the room or reading the nonverbal communication.

So understanding that if my arms are crossed and I'm moving away from you, I'm probably feeling uncomfortable. Or if I'm looking down at the ground, I might be feeling sad. So just, I think it's just really hard for a lot of children. And this is one of the big things I work on to really just understand things that aren't said and understanding the communication is more than just what we say.

It's also how we say it.

**Delphine:** [00:13:52] Yeah. I was just going to say that it, the communication that you as a speech pathologist work on is not only the physical, it sounds weird to use the word physical, cause I don't know if it. Really is defined as that, but the physical use of your mouth to make words you weren't just working on that, you're working on the whole thing.

It's a holistic approach to the mouth, the eyes, the hands of the, the shoulders, the stance, the whole thing.

**Allie:** [00:14:13] Exactly. Yeah.

**Delphine:** [00:14:15] Which I now am putting two and two together. As a parent, who's had my child or children at your center in one of your programs where it's run with the occupational therapist and those people who've listened to previous episodes.

We had , one of your colleagues, the occupational therapist, Brittany came on. And I'm now seeing the connection between the occupational therapist and what they do, and the connection between what you do as a speech. Language pathologists that whole piece coming together.

Exactly. That's why our groups are so great because we have the OT and the SLP side, which is why I'm sad that during COVID we haven't been able to run groups, but you can't really have one without the other.

Oftentimes children are having difficulties with their social communication because they're having difficulty regulating their emotions. But also they're having difficulty regulating their emotions because they're having challenges with their social communication skills. So that's why Brittany and I work together on the groups with the children on both self-regulation and social communication, because they are so intertwined and you can't really separate them.

It's so rare to be able to separate them.

Yeah, no. And it's. It's like just sitting with you talking now I get it right. Like I get it. I got it before, but I feel like now I can see how the two pieces really come together and having seen that program in action, the benefits of being able to have both sides of the coin, because it really is two sides that kind of bring it together is really awesome.

Let's say I'm a parent and I have a ten-year-old at home and there are some articulation issues. There's some speech issues, life is busy and you didn't get to it. You didn't think it was really a problem because you understood everything as a parent. Is there ever a point at which getting support for speech language is like it's past the point of being able to support?

**Allie:** [00:16:09] No, definitely not. I would say, as long as the client or the child has the motivation to make the change and is willing to put in the work. It does not matter if I have a 10, 11, 12 year old who has no interest in fixing his or her AR or his lisp. For example, then, I'm not going to get. That child to do their homework most likely.

I probably could in some way, but it's not going to be meaningful to the child. And therefore they're probably not going to do their practice and their homework and all the stuff that you need to do in order to make the change. So in terms of. Is it ever too late? Absolutely not. As long as there's motivation to make a change and to actually put in the work.

And that's why, we see people of all ages. Like I said, we see 80 year olds, ninty year olds who have had a stroke and have lost their ability to communicate. If they want to make the change, they will make the change. So it's definitely never too late.

**Delphine:** [00:17:09] Okay. So one of the things that I think.

Connected for me. And that I've read through research and I've begun to understand is it sometimes speech delay can be a precursor for a like ding. There might be something more going on in terms of a learning disability and exceptionality, whether it's ADHD, whether it's a specific learning disability, whether it's autism, for example,

why is that?

What is the connection between delayed speech and an LD or exceptionality knowing that, you're not necessarily an expert in. In the field of diagnoses in terms of LDS and things,

but

there certainly seems to be a connection between a delay in speech and a connection to LD. So I wonder if you have any insight for families in terms of what that's about and how they can start to turn things to the positive.

**Allie:** [00:18:04] Yeah. I don't know how much more insight I have. , In terms of what you just say, cause you just covered it pretty well. But yeah, there's a ton of evidence that language delays or speech delays have an impact on academic and learning abilities in the future, especially literacy skills.

Because in terms of literacy, written language is just an extension of oral language. So if a child has difficulty with. Verbal language or oral language. They're probably going to have challenges with written language and reading. If a child doesn't have a strong vocabulary, that's a precursor to reading.

So without a strong vocabulary, you're probably going to have some difficulties with reading, or if you have difficulties comprehending language. You might have difficulties comprehending what someone is reading to you or what you're reading. So everything kind of ties into each other and a child that is struggling with these areas definitely will need some explicit teaching to help build the skills.

, and yeah, there's definitely evidence to support that LDS and language delays are definitely , related to each other.

**Delphine:** [00:19:13] So I think the key message that I'm getting is that if as a parent, you suspect there might be some sort of delay in the language, whether it's the actual communicating of the words or the understanding of the words that in either one of those cases or both.

Together, which is also possible that in that case, you want to try and get support to start on a positive trajectory forward. And the earlier the better

**Allie:** [00:19:38] yes, exactly. So in a psycho ed assessment, yeah. They will most often, unless it's completely not warranted, do some sort of language assessment , to look at just the overall language functioning of the child.

And in that case, if a psychologist who's doing the assessment notices that there's any, , language-based learning disability or even a child that doesn't qualify for anything, , their scores on the language tests are just borderline.

Then they'll refer to a speech pathologist to just get that extra. Teaching and that extra explicit instruction , to help them catch up to their peers. It's hard to say if they'll ever, if a child will ever be completely caught up, who knows, but just the express, the explicit teaching of the skills is definitely necessary for a lot of children.

**Delphine:** [00:20:23] So let's move on to a funner part now was talking to my guests about these things cause they always have great insights to give. So I'm wondering if you have any really good book recommendations for families exploring speech therapy as a possible resource. What kind of. Tidbits that you got for us.

**Allie:** [00:20:39] So yeah, in terms of families exploring like actually going to speech therapy, I recently came across two books. I haven't read them, but I recently came across them in a Facebook group. One is called Aiden goes to speech and one is called. Sammy goes to speech. They look excellent. I think it's just about a child.

Who's nervous to go to speech therapy, but is having some difficulty communicating. And then in terms of what I actually use in my practice, I have a feeling Brittany probably talked about some of these, but , some of my go-to for social communication. Are the we thinkers books from the social thinking curriculum.

And then also Julia cookbooks, because she writes about all of these different skills that every child I work with needs. , not interrupting, accepting no for an answer. Stuff like that. So she really takes all of the little skills and puts it into a book, which I love. And then something pretty exciting is I'm actually in the process of writing my own children's book right now.

So I'm actually currently getting it illustrated. The book is going to be about reading nonverbal communication. So body language, facial expression, and tone of voice in for younger children. Cause there's a lot for, seven, eight, nine, but there's really nothing for three, four or five year olds.

So I wrote a three-part series one on body language, went on facial expression and went on tone of voice and I'm hoping to get those published. Whether that's from a publisher or self-published by hopefully mid 20, 21. So that's the goal. And hopefully they, I really just want the, why did them for myself, but then I realized that maybe other people could benefit from them.

Those

**Delphine:** [00:22:23] all sound really interesting. And the one that I wanted to interrupt you on,

**Allie:** [00:22:26] when were you? I

**Delphine:** [00:22:28] guess it was the cookbook one where it's like how to accept no, and all those things. I feel like that is even for children who do not have exceptionalities. Yes. All children bar, none from six months to.

Oh, into twenties, probably there's probably some parents. We could use those social stories.

**Allie:** [00:22:45] Yes. She's fantastic. She really hits every single skill that, I, every time I need a book for a specific goal for a child, I just Google and there's always a Julia cookbook.

**Delphine:** [00:22:58] Are there any good , apps or web pages that you recommend to families?

**Allie:** [00:23:03] So most speech and language specific apps. Generally costs money. If any parents are actually interested, there's a company called super-duper that makes fantastic apps , for a price and more general apps to support language skills like vocabulary, prepositions, pronouns , all of the Toca life apps, Toca Boca , play home is another app that you can get a free part of the app and they have to pay for more.

When I worked with really young children before , I used to use this app called peekaboo barn that helped children to work on animal sounds and animal names. I just love that one. So that one popped up in my brain . So those are the ones that really stick out to me.

**Delphine:** [00:23:45] Okay. And what about, we talked a little bit about what families can do at home to support their kids in terms of, getting them to ask for what they want, making it a little bit more difficult than just no grunt and you, as the parent provide them with set item.

I certainly was that parent with our middle

child,

didn't always help him much,

but let's talk about what educators can do

in a classroom. So you're a teacher in a classroom and there's a couple of kids or one child who has some communication issues, whether it's a social communication issue. Or whether it's simply just a speech issue.

Are there any things that teachers can do within a classroom that can help support the child?

**Allie:** [00:24:19] Yeah, for sure. So obviously depends on the child, but , when it comes to language, a big suggestion that I give to all teachers is to use a lot of visuals to support language skills. Whether that's a visual schedule or visuals for instructions, children that are having difficulties with language often respond very well to visuals , giving one direction at a time.

So not throwing a million things at every child at the child's. All at once, separate all the directions, one at a time, give specific directions, use concrete language. So don't use things that can be misinterpreted. Don't say a pop squat or something like that. Like a figure of speech should be speed.

Pretty

**Delphine:** [00:25:01] because

**Allie:** [00:25:02] money doesn't work well. And , give a lot of repetition. I think that is one of the main things that really helps with children who are struggling with language, providing a lot of repetition. And then when it comes to social communication, just be mindful at recess about what's going on and try and, talk to the child.

One-on-one if you're finding that they're having trouble socially , obviously keeping parents in the loop so that they can seek services, if they need to. That's

**Delphine:** [00:25:29] awesome. Thank you so much, Allie, thank you for taking the time tonight to tell us a little bit more about what you do and what other speech pathologists do and what families should be looking out for.

If they think it's a good fit or they think it's something they should consider where can people find out more about you?

Thank you so much for having me on your podcast. First of all , I would love to promote my services at the red Oak center , where I support social communication, articulation, and language.

And then I also work at the speech and stuttering Institute where I support children who stutter. And I'm currently in the process of getting my website up and running. I will give you the link and hopefully by the time this podcast comes out, my website will be up and running. It's going to be called express yourself speech, and I'm going to use it for a lot of blogs.

**Allie:** [00:26:14] And ultimately for my book, when my book does come out. So keep your eyes peeled for that.

**Delphine:** [00:26:21] When this podcast comes out in the podcast description , families will be able to go in and find all of the goodies that Allie has just given us , from the app suggestions to the books, to the websites, all those good things.

We'll have all of that in the description of the podcast. So once again, Allie, thank you so much. And I really appreciate you taking the time. This is a super interesting conversation.

Thank you so much. I really appreciate it. .