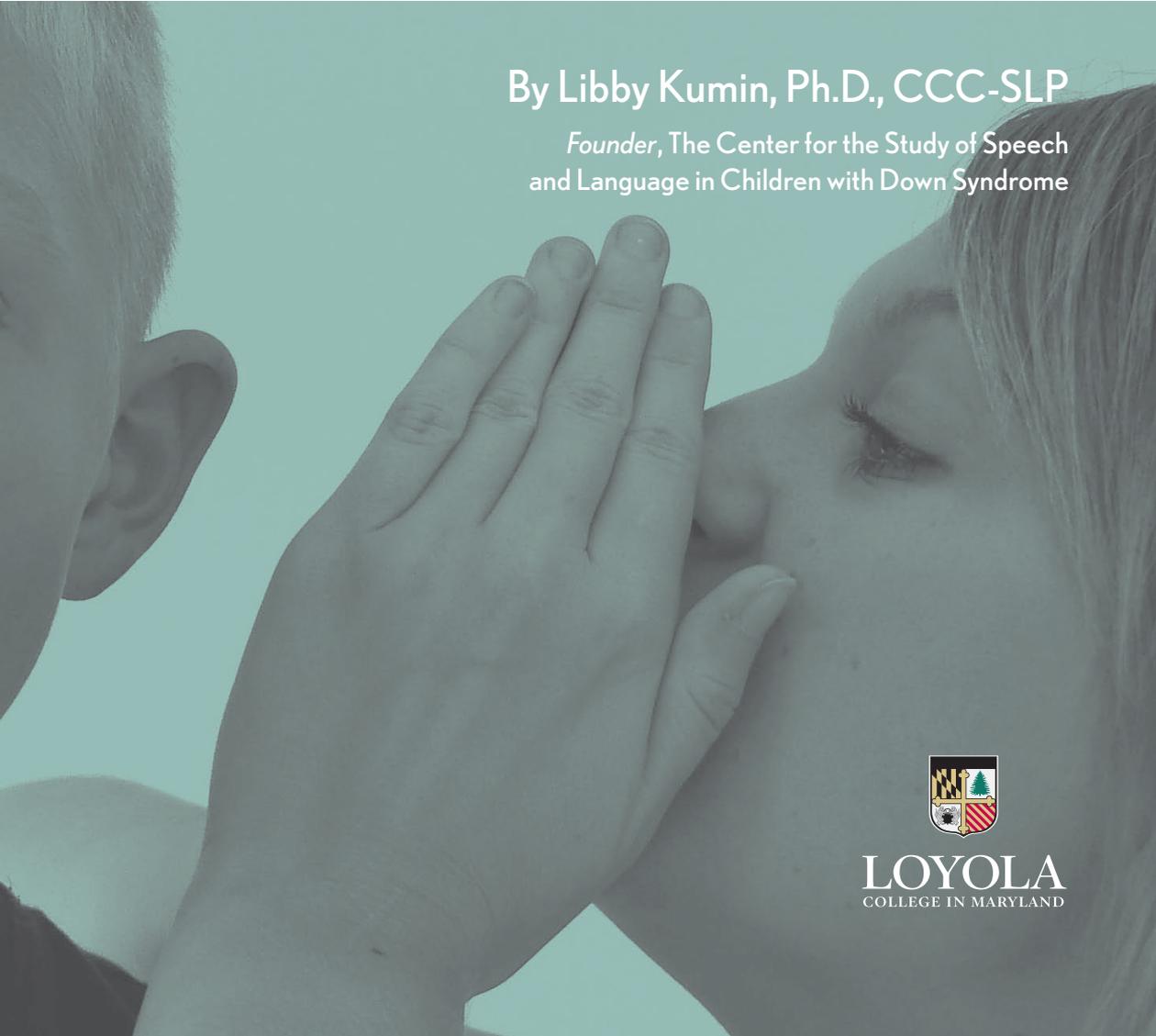




The Basis for Speech, Language and Communication in People with Down Syndrome



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How do we interact with other people?

The way that we send and receive messages is communication. Communication can be visual, verbal and/or nonverbal. We communicate through how we present ourselves, how we look, what we wear and whether we are scowling or smiling. We communicate nonverbally through gestures such as a shrug of the shoulders or pointing, and we communicate verbally through a sigh, laugh, or a word. There are many ways to communicate. We can use a hug to show love or we can say, sign or write the word love.

- Communication is holistic.
- Communication can be powerful in affecting the environment.
- Communication may be unintentional or intentional.
- Communication includes verbal and nonverbal messages

When we want to send messages that can be understood by people in our community, we use language. We can use English, Spanish, French or any other language that is shared by the people around us, so that they can understand what we are saying. Language is not holistic; it uses specific vocabulary and specific grammatical rules. When we call a writing instrument a pen, we use that word because in the English speaking community, people will understand what that means. When we say, "The pen fell under the table," they will look down and help us locate the pen." They know the "referents", what pen, under, and table mean. Could a person say, "The rlinker is bolu the nofy." Yes, but noone would know what that means, because it uses sound combinations that are not words in English and do not represent objects. We use language to communicate specific concepts and experiences to others. We learn a specific language from our family and teachers, thus we learn the language from the community around us. Language may include gestures, signs, pictures, and/or speech.

- Language is a shared code.
- Language is an arbitrary code that uses symbols to represent real objects and events.
- Language has rules that specify how to use the code.
- Language is used intentionally or purposefully.
- Language is a learned code.
- Language is learned through social interaction.

Most people communicate through speaking. Speech is verbal language.

- Speech uses the same systems in the body used for breathing, swallowing, and eating.
- Speech involves muscle programming, movement, and coordination.
- Speech is complex and involves the coordination of breathing, phonation (voice), resonance and articulation.

Speech is the most difficult communication system for people with Down syndrome. Children with Down syndrome usually understand the concepts of communication and have the desire to communicate at an early age. In infancy, most children with Down syndrome master the pre-language skills that make them ready to use language. Most children with Down syndrome are capable of communicating and using language many months and sometimes even several years before they are able to begin speaking. Until that time, there are pre-speech skills that will provide the foundation for speaking. Since speech builds on the systems used for breathing, swallowing, and eating, we don't have to wait until speech begins before working on the necessary skills.

But, the infant or toddler needs a way to communicate with family and friends until he is ready to speak. Sign language and picture communication systems are the most frequently used systems.

Who Can Help?

A comprehensive communication, language and speech treatment plan needs to be developed for every person with Down syndrome. The professional who can help develop the plan with the family is the speech language pathologist (SLP). The speech-language pathologist (SLP) should have the professional credentials Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP), awarded by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. To earn those credentials, SLPs must complete an undergraduate and Master's degree program that includes intensive supervised clinical practice with children and adults in the areas of speech, language, hearing assessment, and remediation. They must pass a national certification examination, and complete a clinical fellowship training year (CFY) following graduation. If the professional lists "CCC-SLP" following her name, you know that she has completed a rigorous professional program. Speech-language pathologists generally hold a state license, usually granted by the Department of Health. If you need to check whether a professional holds the CCC-SLP and/or the state license, you can call the professional licensure board in your state or call or check the website of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (www.asha.org).

For more information:

Kumin, L. (2003). *Early Communication Skills in Children with Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Kumin, L. (2001). *Classroom language skills for children with Down syndrome: A guide for parents and teachers*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

www.ndscenter.org

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