

What's the Evidence?

Speech therapy for verbal dyspraxia in children with a learning disability

Key findings

- There are no high quality trials evaluating the effectiveness of speech therapy for children with verbal dyspraxia and learning disabilities.
- High quality studies of this therapy are needed for speech and language therapists to make informed evidence based decisions in clinical practice.

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What were we asked?

A professional asked us if there was any evidence on the effectiveness of speech therapy for children with developmental verbal dyspraxia and learning disabilities.

What did we do?

We searched a range of academic databases for evidence to answer the question, and we asked a speech therapist if they knew of any evidence.

What did we find?

What is verbal dyspraxia?

- Children with developmental verbal dyspraxia have difficulty in making and coordinating the movements required to produce clear speech, resulting in an inability to make and combine speech sounds into words.

- This condition often occurs with general developmental dyspraxia, and it is difficult to diagnose because it presents differently depending on the age and developmental stage of the child.

- There is more information about developmental verbal dyspraxia in this information leaflet: Learning Links www.learninglinks.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/LLIS-10_Verbal-Dyspraxia.pdf

What research evidence is there about treatments for children with developmental verbal dyspraxia and learning disabilities?

- The Nuffield Dyspraxia Programme is typically used by speech therapists to treat children with developmental verbal dyspraxia. (www.ndp3.org)

- This programme was developed for children with developmental verbal dyspraxia. A proportion of these children have learning disabilities too, but the programme is not specifically designed for children with learning disabilities and it would have to be modified by the speech and language therapist for these children.
- There are no studies that have specifically investigated the effectiveness of this approach for children with verbal dyspraxia and learning disabilities.
- A Cochrane review published in 2009 found no high quality studies that evaluated the efficacy of treatments for verbal dyspraxia.¹
- A protocol for a randomised controlled trial to compare the effectiveness of the Nuffield Dyspraxia Programme and Rapid Syllable Transition Treatment was

published in 2012.² However, this only includes children without learning disabilities.

- This protocol highlights the lack of well designed trials to evaluate the effectiveness of speech therapy approaches and guide clinical practice.

What do we think?

We didn't find any evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of speech therapy for children with verbal dyspraxia and learning disabilities. Although the Nuffield Dyspraxia Programme is commonly used to treat children with this condition, there have been no high quality studies to evaluate this approach in children with verbal dyspraxia and learning disabilities. High quality studies of this therapy are needed to help parents and speech and language therapists make informed evidence based decisions in practice.

We would like to hear your feedback on this summary – please email us at pencru@exeter.ac.uk if you have any comments or questions.

References

1. Morgan AT. and Vogel AP. 2009. A Cochrane review of treatment for childhood apraxia of speech. *European Journal of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine*. 45 (1): 103-110
2. Murray E. McCabe P. Ballard KJ. A comparison of two treatments for childhood apraxia of speech: methods and treatment protocol for a parallel group randomised controlled trial. *BMC Pediatrics* 3 (12): 112-121

Note: This information is produced by PenCRU researchers and reviewed by external experts. The views expressed are those of PenCRU at the University of Exeter Medical School and do not represent the views of the Cerebra charity, or any other parties mentioned. We strongly recommend seeking medical advice before undertaking any treatments/therapies.