

What? My child can't read properly?

Have you heard those words? It *can* happen - and it creates huge concerns for parents. What do you do and where do you go to get some assistance and information that will help your child?

Andrea Walker, who is heading up Tyquin Group's new speech pathology clinic at Lavender House in Beaudesert, believes that the ability to read accurately and spell correctly is essential for succeeding at school. Difficulties in these areas affect all aspects of the school curriculum.

Learning to read requires that words be sounded out to gain an understanding of each specific word. Children who have difficulty with this have a specific phonological or sound based problem. In many cases the cause of these children's reading difficulties is actually due to language-based problems indicating a need for an assessment by a speech pathologist.

Children identified with reading difficulties have been found to be less motivated to read, think they are less capable of reading than others, get less practice reading and consequently they can fall further and further behind their peers academically.

Recent research suggests that children at risk for reading difficulties can be identified at preschool, before they experience "failure" in their first attempts at learning to read. Several studies have demonstrated the success of speech pathology treatment for children with this specific language-based literacy disorder.

Q. My son is 7 years of age. He is able to produce all his sounds correctly and his language skills are up to standard but he is having a lot of difficulty reading and is a terrible speller. Can a speech pathologist help?

A. *Yes - in many cases. A speech pathologist can assess your child to see whether his reading and spelling difficulties are language based. If they are, a speech pathologist can assist.*

Q. My daughter is 14 years of age. She has a lot of trouble spelling words in particular by dictation. She tends to spell words how she hears them. Can a speech pathologist help her?

A. *Yes. Your daughter may be having difficulties identifying which sounds she hears and then transferring what she hears (using the sound rules of English) into written language. A speech pathologist would be able to assess and treat your child.*

Difficulties in these areas are called phonological awareness (awareness of sounds in words) deficits. I would recommend an assessment by a speech pathologist.

An assessment by a speech pathologist could reveal that these children may have difficulty with:

- a) phonological awareness (i.e. the knowledge that words can be broken down into smaller parts and that these parts can be moved around to create new words) and/or
- b) oral language development

Speech pathologists are trained to assess, diagnose and treat children who have difficulties in the areas of phonological awareness and/or oral language development.

Remember, early detection and treatment is important to prevent long-term problems.