

## **Worried about your child's literacy development?**

In this edition of Woman & Child, we present the case of an eight year old boy called George. George's parents reported that he was born at full term with no complications or special post-natal care required. George's mum reported that he reached his speech, language, and motor milestones within the expected timeframes.

### **Parent's Concern:**

George's parents were concerned because George was having significant difficulties at school. His parents and classroom teacher felt that the primary reason for George's difficulties was his delayed literacy development. George was finding it extremely difficult and time consuming to complete his schoolwork, because, by the time he managed to read the question the other children were ready to move onto the next activity.

### **Assessment:**

To determine the reason for George's literacy difficulties, his Phonological Awareness and literacy skills were assessed by the Speech Pathologist.

Phonological Awareness is a metalinguistic skill that relates to an awareness that words can be segmented into syllables and phonemes (individual sounds) which can then be manipulated and blended to create new words. This includes, among numerous other skills, the ability to:

- recognise and produce rhyming words
- count the number of syllables and individual sounds in words
- recognise the first and last sounds in words
- manipulate individual sounds in words to produce new words

Research has shown that deficits in Phonological Awareness are strongly linked to reading and spelling difficulties. Phonological Awareness difficulties are a common cause for delayed literacy development.

An in-depth assessment revealed that George was experiencing significant difficulties in many areas of Phonological Awareness.

### **The Problem**

George's delayed Phonological Awareness development, as is the case for so many children with Phonological Awareness deficits, was contributing to his reading and spelling difficulties, causing frustration, behavioural problems, reduced self-esteem, and poor academic results.

### **What to do:**

George attended weekly therapy sessions with his mother. These sessions primarily focussed on improving George's Phonological Awareness skills. During these sessions George's mother was also taught ways to help George develop his Phonological Awareness and literacy skills.

### **Outcome:**



George is now nine years of age and is no longer struggling with his schoolwork. His behaviour and whole outlook on school has improved dramatically. He now enjoys school and his report card is full of praise and good results.

**Concluding Note:**

Many children experience reading and spelling difficulties. This can be very worrying for parents and teachers, as it is difficult for them to know whether the child will simply “catch up to their peers” without specific intervention. Research has shown, however, that early intervention is optimal. Early treatment of Phonological Awareness disorder has been found to assist in avoiding, not only future literacy problems, but also subsequent behavioural and academic difficulties. Therapy with older children, and even adults, however, has also been shown to be effective in remediating longstanding difficulties.

Several studies have demonstrated the success of intervention by Speech Pathologists in improving children’s literacy skills. Speech Pathologists’ training in phonics, language, and metalinguistics skills provide the most appropriate background for assessing and treating children with a phonological awareness disorder.

Speech Pathologists are trained to assess, diagnose, and treat difficulties in this, and all other areas of communication.

**If you want to know more about your child’s speech, language, or literacy – give us a call at TYQUIN GROUP SPEECH PATHOLOGY - Phone 3399 8028, or visit our website at [www.tyquin.com.au](http://www.tyquin.com.au)**