

The Specific language impairment

Doležalová, Markéta a Michaela Chotěborová. *Vývojová dysfázie: Průvodce pro rodiče a další zájemce o tuto problematiku* | Praha: Pasparta, 2021 | ISBN 978-80-88290-68-1

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Specific language impairment is generally one of the most common diagnoses encountered by speech language therapists (or speech language pathologists). It is a complicated diagnosis, one of the more therapeutically demanding ones, where impairments in all levels of language are present. At the same time, the individual burden of each child is very much in evidence, with the literature repeatedly stating that each child with Specific Language Impairment is slightly different and affected differently by this diagnosis. It is undoubtedly very useful to summarise as much up-to-date information as possible on the topic of Specific Language Impairment. Any publication on the subject will therefore attract attention.

The authors of the book – Doležalová and Chotěborová – both work as speech language therapists / speech language pathologists in health care, where they often encounter this issue. Their book summarises the basic characteristics of the topic and diagnosis of Specific Language Impairment in a total of 9 chapters and is intended not only for parents of children with this diagnosis who need to know more information, but also for anyone else interested in the subject.

The first part of the book presents 2 short case studies of children with the diagnosis of Specific Language Impairment of the same type. The case histories are written from the parents' perspective and mainly summarize personal, family, objective and school history. There is a greater emphasis on the schooling period – the cases present the possible impact on the area of school performance and the limitations and constraints that parents expect their children to experience at this stage of life. The case studies could have been more varied if examples of children with a different type of diagnosis of Specific Language Impairment had been used. A summary of the speech and language therapist's perspective on these particular children would also have been beneficial, so that the examples go more in depth and do not just summarise the parents' feelings. There is then an addition by the authors at the end of the

short case studies that clarifies some of the concepts mentioned – this clarification could just include a speech therapist's commentary.

The following chapter is devoted to the diagnosis of Specific Language Impairment as such and the aim of the whole chapter is to provide as much detail as possible and to refute possible misinformation about this diagnosis. The chapter also includes a differential diagnosis, but this could be given more attention. In particular, because the book is intended to serve as a source of information, the diagnoses within the differential diagnosis should be fleshed out and explained more. The third chapter is devoted to the specialties to which parents can refer (speech language therapists / speech language pathologists, various physicians, facilities, etc.). The fourth chapter presents basic symptomatology – a well-organized summary of the main symptoms of Specific Language Impairment, from the typical to the less frequent. Next, the child's manifestations at each developmental stage are discussed – from early childhood, through preschool, subsequent schooling, and into adulthood. This division shows very well and clearly the specifics of the diagnosis in each period. It is also useful to describe directly the risks where the child may conceal difficulties so that the parent does not notice them until later, or considers them to be manifestations of another diagnosis. The book also describes the social aspect and the implications in this area, including why these children prefer a different way of playing, interacting, etc. The implications in the area of comprehension, which complicate subsequent schooling in particular and may be misinterpreted by the teacher, are also discussed.

The fifth chapter presents a set of tips and advice on how to develop a child with this specific diagnosis in the best possible way. The emphasis is primarily on speech understanding as an area without which even spoken language cannot develop adequately. The authors' experience confirms the previously known fact that this area is often underestimated in the child at the beginning. Parents, in particular, often notice the deficit in understanding only later, because they feel that the child understands them. The child may also develop a number of compensatory mechanisms to mask the speech comprehension deficit, which the authors point out and give several examples of such masking in the book, such as reliance on gestures and facial expressions. The area of speech understanding is always crucial. This is also why speech language therapists / speech language pathologists have already begun to focus on developing tests to better assess a child's comprehension at an early age, e.g. Mgr. Gabriela Solná in cooperation with other speech language therapists / speech language pathologists in 2022 created an already published test for this area – the so-called TEPO test.

In the following section, the authors provide a list of how to proceed in order to promote speech comprehension as much as possible. Initially, they write about the need for the child to visualize speech and recommend that visualization be included in the representation of the mode of the day, followed by the inclusion of gestures and signs, essentially introducing a mode that approaches the principles of total

communication, turn-taking, commenting on activities, etc. In this respect, the book is reminiscent of the principles already mentioned, for example, in the publication *How to talk to children from birth to three years*, written by Kapalková, Hornáková and Mikulajová in 2009. The book also subsequently mentions this publication as another possible source of additional information. Emphasis is placed on respecting the child's current speech level, manipulating objects, sorting and categorising (superordinate concepts), making connections, developing spatial orientation, or relying on stories and fairy tale motifs, and generally supporting the child's narrative skills as well. Reading fairy tales is also ideally combined with picture reading – the child 'reads' the picture and the narrator reads the written text – which can reinforce the child's interest in the story. These principles are also used in speech language therapy by professionals (speech language therapists / speech language pathologists). The authors also provide tips on possible publications that can be used for this purpose.

The book also briefly summarises the periodisation of speech development from the individual stages, what a child should generally be able to do at what age and then derives from this how to develop spoken language. Emphasis is also placed on the situation where the child has an overabundance of stimuli around him that overwhelm him and therefore speech does not develop adequately (the book gives an example from practice where a parent was attending to the child and talking to him at the same time the television was playing and the child was playing with a favourite sound toy), the overabundance of stimuli is beautifully demonstrated in this example. However, correct speech patterns, plenty of appropriate stimuli, development of language sense, etc. are also important.

The authors also point to impairments in auditory perception and auditory memory. It is advisable to start developing these areas intensively from the age of 3 years. The book also contains instructions on how to implement such exercises. It is very helpful that the instructions include, in addition to a demonstration of the specific activity, an age range from which to try the activity with the child. It also mentions the development of visual perception, the development of motor skills and more. A considerable part of the chapter is also devoted to children's drawing, specifically its technical aspect, the correct grip of the pencil, practising and training this skill and laterality.

The following chapter describes the child with Specific Language Impairment in kindergarten and then in primary school. The impact of kindergarten on these children is usually positive – the child gradually improves in all areas. The book also gives a number of tips for teachers on how to communicate most effectively with children with Specific Language Impairment in the kindergarten environment, what to look out for, etc. In terms of primary school, it is usually a very challenging time for these children. It is therefore necessary to keep this in mind and to support the child with Specific Language Impairment as much as possible when starting primary

school. The publication also highlights the importance of appropriate consideration of when a child starts school and what type of school or support to choose for the child. The publication briefly summarises the pros and cons of all the options available in the Czech Republic.

The book concludes with tips on possible stimulation programmes that can be used with children with Specific Language Impairment to support their development. This is an important component that is very beneficial in the book. There is also an interview with an adult who summarises his childhood and school experiences in the context of his diagnosis of Specific Language Impairment. At the end of the book is a list of recommended appropriate tools, materials and publications that can be used when working with children with Specific Language Impairment.

Overall, the book is written more for the general public or for parents of children diagnosed with Specific Language Impairment, but it summarizes important points from the point of view of educators, special educators and speech language therapists / speech language pathologists. This is undoubtedly a useful publication that brings together in one place basic professional knowledge as well as tips and advice on how to work with the diagnosis and what to focus on. The practical knowledge and transfer of knowledge from practice is a great asset, with practical guidance on exactly what to develop and how. The downside is the sparseness of specialist knowledge that could be described in more detail. The book should also include more recent literature, foreign articles or research and overall could go even deeper into the topic of Specific Language Impairment. However, given its primary purpose and target audience, this is a very good publication that can be recommended as a source of information on the subject, especially to parents of children with Specific Language Impairment.

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