

Too Many Children "Lost" Pinpoint Oral Handicap At Early Age

By Vivian Lee Bowden
Los Angeles Times/Washington Post Service

A child is lost, lost because many of us do not know he is missing.

These are the children who are lost to the world of spoken language. Either because they do not hear, or because they cannot speak easily and understandably with others.

Finding such children early, so they can be helped before first grade complicates the problem, has always been a challenge. Too often parents don't know how to recognize a language handicap.

Today there are more of these missing children than ever before because of the epidemic of rubella (three-day, German measles) which swept the country in 1964. Of the 200 children with cases of rubella studied by Dr. Janet Hardyn in Baltimore, 50 per cent had damaged hearing.

"Women who were in the first six months of pregnancy during this epidemic should be particularly alert to the possibility of hearing impairments in their children," said Dr. Hardyn, associate professor of pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University. "Some babies, who appear perfectly normal at birth, later develop problems due to the persistence of infection in their bodies."

Of the 1,350 women pregnant during the epidemic in the Baltimore area, whom she studied, she found that 5 per

cent were affected by rubella. The Baltimore epidemic began in October 1963, reached its peak in March and April of 1964, and died down during the summer. A new outbreak occurred in the fall of 1964.

Reports for other Eastern areas showed an epidemic in the spring of 1964, which reached a peak in March and April and died down in June. Rubella during a woman's early pregnancy can cripple her child with multiple handicaps, like blindness, deafness, cardiac disease, central nervous system disorders and retarded development.

SUCH MARKED cases are usually identified early. But public health officers are now concerned because children with milder handicaps, such as impaired hearing alone, are less likely to be recognized and referred for treatment at the very time therapy can be most effective—the preschool years.

"Most of the children affected during this rubella epidemic are now between two and three-years-old," said Dr. Ruth Alice Asbed, chief of the division of maternal and child health for Montgomery county, Md. "The problem we face is how to find them all."

"Although increased num-

bers of the more severely damaged children are being picked up by physicians and clinics, national studies lead us to doubt that we are picking up all the ones with more subtle damage, children who look good, but who may have damaged hearing."

How do you know whether your child has a speech and hearing problem?

"The most common example is the child who doesn't talk very plainly," said Mrs. Richard L. Mashland, a speech pathologist and mother of four, who is consultant to two universities and to the Easter seal treatment center.

"By the time they are four-and-half or five, most children ought to be able to talk intelligibly so that parents and neighbors can understand them. If a child cannot be understood, you should find the reasons why. It may be that he has a hearing problem."

Most speech sounds are a mixture of sound frequencies. The child may hear low-frequency sounds, like vowels, but not high-frequency sounds, like "s," "sh," "th," and "f."

"If a child is not hearing these sounds, he probably cannot say them either," Mrs. Mashland continued. "To hear the difference between 'fan'

and 'pan' requires very fine discrimination between the 'f' and 'p' sounds."

The child's hearing range can be determined by giving him a pure-tone test, in which he is asked to distinguish tones of different frequencies fed to him through earphones. His response to words spoken at different volumes can also be checked by having him listen to a specially prepared tape recording.

ANOTHER SOURCE of speech difficulty may be an articulation defect in which the child substitutes some sounds for others.

"Some children with perfectly good hearing still make sound substitutions," said Mrs. Mashland. "By the time they are seven, most children are saying all the sounds in the English language. They are pronouncing 'r,' 'l' and 's' correctly."

"If a seven-year-old is still making a few substitutions, this is all right. But a child making sound substitutions by age eight probably should have therapy."

Delay in learning to talk is another danger sign. "By the time they are one year old, most children can say one or two words," said Mrs. Mashland. "By age two,

children can make a few short sentences.

"If your child only saying two or three words by the time he is three, you ought to be quite concerned. If at the same time he does not understand when you ask him to do and find an object, he really is in trouble and you want to know why."

Although delay in talking can be due to mental retardation, slow development or psychological disturbances, the cause may simply be a hearing problem.

Then there is the child who acts deaf, but isn't.

"We are finding that auditory attention is an important ingredient of a child's ability to communicate," said Mrs. Mashland. "He may be able to hear, yet he cannot keep track

of incoming sounds. All are confusing to him and since speech is not understandable, he turns it off.

"He has to be taught what speech sounds like and what order the words come in. He needs careful teaching from the point where he is able to hear and comprehend meaningful units of sound."

POOR AUDITORY memory can also give a child trouble. "Some children can repeat a sound perfectly after you have said it first," observed Mrs. Mashland, "but three minutes later, when you ask them what the sound was, they have forgotten."

"We are beginning to learn about the role of memory in speech and hearing, and also in reading. Some school age children cannot remember what a printed word sounds like."

"We teach these children rules for remembering with intensive drills. We bring in other senses besides seeing and hearing, senses like touch and feel, to make some hooks for memory. The idea is to weave together the strong

thread and the weak thread."

Thinking back to the years before her marriage, when she started the first speech clinic in Canada, Mrs. Mashland said that the major differences between then and now is that now doctors are no longer willing to wait until a child is five or six to see whether he outgrows a problem.

"The normally developing child is constantly bathed in language; this is how his vocabulary grows. He learns words almost unconsciously. For the deaf child, everything is so much on the conscious level. Even a bright child with this handicap will not learn to talk without special teaching.

"By waiting until school age to correct a problem you can get emotional overlays to speech and language retardation which can complicate the picture," said Mashland. "With the diagnostic abilities and therapy we have today, it isn't necessary to wait.

"This is why I am really so enthusiastic about pre-school therapy. It can nip the problem in the bud."

Allergy Aches

NEW YORK—(UPI)—Some of those aches and pains in joints, attributed to rheumatoid arthritis, may be due to food allergy in hypersensitive persons.

Foods suspected of causing arthritic symptoms easily are tested by consuming one of them at a time, to see if the symptoms accompany it or disappear when that food is eliminated from the diet, says Dr. Bernard M. Zussman, University of Tennessee, in a report in the St. Thomas Medical Journal.

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Service Groups Invited To Hear UMATT Story

Flyers have been mailed to service organizations in the area announcing plans for a meeting of representatives to hear the UMATT story. Women of UMATT are arranging the 7:30 p.m. meeting July 10 in Kennedy union at the University of Dayton.

Recent developments in the UMATT story — United Missions Air Training and Transport—are the addition of three new volunteers to the staff: Gad Soffer, assistant professor of political science at UD, who will assist with promotion; Yukuo Masuda, NCR engineer, who will make documentary films; and Mrs. Raymond N. Merena, who will edit the newsletter, "The Dove."

Recent contributions to the "flying peace corps" have included a Ford Bronco, donated by a foundation, to be used in East Africa to take cargo and personnel to UMATT airstrips, and \$5,000 from an anonymous donor.

Brother Michael Stimac, president of UMATT, was the guest speaker at the national meeting of the Ninety-Nines, women pilots, in convention in Washington, D.C., yesterday and today.

Home Start

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will enjoy a wooden work bench with hammer, nails and screw driver. They should have wooden puzzles to put together and perhaps a beanbag game to help them gain skill in throwing.

The five- and six-year-olds can have assorted building blocks, a vise, a saw and a blackboard. Toys and materials should be added gradually so that while the child has an opportunity to explore new activities with his hands and arms he is not smothered nor discouraged by having too many things that he cannot do at one time.

(TOMORROW: Gaining control of small muscles.)
You can obtain Prof. Nason's helpful booklet by sending \$1 to "Help Your Child Succeed in School," in care of The Dayton Journal Herald, Box 1277, General Post Office, New York.

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