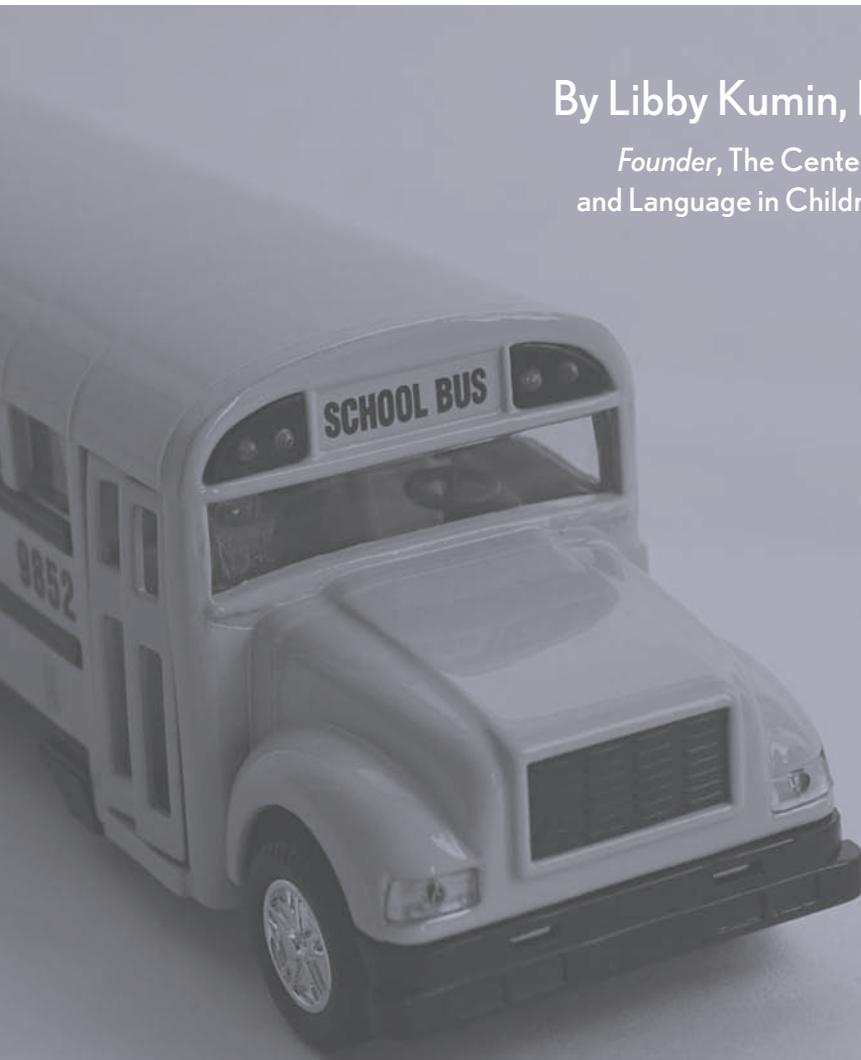


SPEECH AND LANGUAGE RESOURCE GUIDE

# For Parents of School-Age Children with Down Syndrome

By Libby Kumin, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

*Founder, The Center for the Study of Speech  
and Language in Children with Down Syndrome*



**LOYOLA**  
COLLEGE IN MARYLAND

## Why can't my child communicate?

School aged children have a wide variety of communication strengths and challenges. Some children speak clearly, but many children have speech intelligibility difficulties. Most children understand more than they can say. Language skills are often below cognitive abilities. This combination of speech that is hard to understand and language difficulty often leads people to underestimate what children with Down syndrome are capable of doing. The most common communication problems for school aged children with Down syndrome are:

- Poor auditory memory (difficulty remembering what he has heard)
- Difficulties with verbal short term memory (difficulty holding on to what he has just heard)
- Difficulties with expressive language (word retrieval, formulating sentences)
- Receptive-expressive language gap (understand more than they can say)
- Difficulty in the area of morphosyntax (grammar, word prefixes and suffixes)
- Relative strength in the area of vocabulary
- Relative strength in the area of pragmatics (social language use)
- Difficulty with conversational skills (short conversations)
- Difficulty with topicalization (introducing topics, sustaining topics, staying on topic)
- Difficulty with clarification and repairs (communication misunderstandings)
- Difficulty with making verbal requests
- Short mean length of utterance (MLU) (short sentences when speaking)

## What type of speech and language evaluation and treatment are needed?

Your child's speech and language skills in all of the following areas should be assessed, and treatment should be provided in all areas in which your child is experiencing difficulty:

### Receptive Language Skills

Comprehension  
Vocabulary and concept development

Auditory memory  
Auditory processing  
Following complex directions  
Literacy

### Expressive Language Skills

Vocabulary  
Expanding MLU  
Morphology

Syntax

Answering questions

Literacy/Reading aloud

### **School Language Skills**

Language of the Curriculum

Language of Instruction

Language of the Hidden Curriculum

Language of Testing

Language of Classroom Routines

### **Pragmatics/Social Language Skills**

Requests

Social interactive skills

Conversational skills

Narrative discourse

Clarifications and Repairs

### **Speech Skills**

Articulation

Phonology

Oral motor skills

Childhood apraxia of speech (if needed)

Speech intelligibility

## **What can I do to improve my child's ability to communicate?**

During the school years, parents can help by working closely with the speech-language pathologist. Be sure that a home-school communication plan, and a home practice program are written in to the IEP. That way, parents will know what is being worked on in speech and language therapy sessions, and can follow up with home practice or enrichment experiences (going to museums, studying the marine and plant life in a local pond). Your child needs an effective communication system at all ages and in all situations. If his speech cannot be understood, an alternative or augmentative communication system should be considered. IDEA defines assistive technology and mandates that the need for assistive technology be considered by the IEP team. If a communication board or communication device is recommended through the IEP process, the system needs to be available whenever your child communicates, at home, school, and in the community. A communication system that is only used during a speech session is not an effective communication system for your child.

## **Where can I go for help?**

Children with Down syndrome usually qualify for speech and language services in elementary school through the special education/IEP process. Each school system has criteria for speech and language services, and your child's test results need to meet certain criteria to be eligible for services through the schools.

Books, conferences and presentations will also help you learn more about how to help your child with speech and language. Speech and language services may be available through your local school system as part of the IEP, medical centers, community clinics

(such as The ARC and Easter Seals), university clinics, and private practitioners. Your local parent support group is an excellent source of information to help in locating professionals in your area.

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Kumin, L. (2002). Maximizing speech and language in children and adolescents with Down syndrome, in Cohen, W., Nadel, L. & Madnick, M. (Eds). *Down syndrome: Visions for the 21st century* (403-415). NY:Wiley-Liss.

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Kumin, L. (2001). *Classroom language skills for children with Down syndrome: A guide for parents and teachers*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

[www.ndscenter.org](http://www.ndscenter.org)

[www.ndss.org](http://www.ndss.org)

[www.ds-health.com](http://www.ds-health.com)

[www.downsed.org](http://www.downsed.org)