



MEDIA RELEASE

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October is Autism Awareness Month in Canada

An estimated one in 165 Canadian children under the age of six will be identified as having an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to the Autism Society Canada. Children with one of these disorders may exhibit difficulties in one or all of three general areas: verbal and non-verbal communication, social interaction or the presence of repetitive or stereotyped interests or behaviour. This affects communication with family members, peers, caregivers and teachers. Many symptoms of autism occur with varying levels of severity.

Speech-language pathologists (S-LPs), who are represented by the national professional association the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA), have an important role to play in the identification and treatment of ASD because this disorder effects speech, language and other forms of communication.

“Pre-screening and assessment is needed by an S-LP in order to identify what exactly the communication problems are,” says Donna Carter, CASLPA S-LP member. “Other problems (such as behaviour, anxiety, attention, sensory) can be informally observed by the S-LP and then referred to psychology/occupational therapy.”

Children suspected of having ASD benefit from the expertise of interprofessional teams, which may consist of a physician, psychologist, occupational therapist and S-LP, among others. “The S-LP needs to assess language in order to make differential diagnoses (treatment method used to rule out other language disorders). This will ensure that it is not another communication problem with similar symptoms,” adds Carter.

“Without detailed knowledge of the child’s language level, it would be difficult for non S-LPs to determine whether or not there are other reasons for a child’s language difficulties,” added Carter. “Without detailed evaluation of language, these children are at risk for mis-diagnosis”

If someone in your life has communication problems associated with Autism, CASLPA suggests consulting your physician and a speech-language pathologist. CASLPA represents the professional needs of more than 5,500 speech-language pathologists, audiologists and supportive personnel. For more information about the role speech-language pathologists, audiologists and supportive personnel play in the treatment of communication disorders or to find a S-LP or audiologist in your area, visit CASLPA’s website at www.speechandhearing.ca.

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For more information, please contact:
Angie D’Aoust, CASLPA Director of Communications
1-800-259-8519, or by email angie@caslpa.ca
www.speechandhearing.ca · www.caslpa.ca