It Takes Two to Talk®

The Hanen Program® for Parents of Children with Language Delays

Program Summary

It Takes Two to Talk® — The Hanen Program® for Parents of Children with Language Delays is a well-known model of family-focused early language intervention for young children with expressive and/or receptive language disorders. The goal of *It Takes Two to Talk* is to empower parents to become their child's primary language facilitator, thereby maximizing the child's opportunities for communication development in everyday situations. *It Takes Two to Talk* is offered to children with receptive and expressive language delays under the age of five who may or may not have other developmental concerns (Weitzman, Girolametto & Drake, 2017).

Program Features

The *It Takes Two to Talk* Program has the following features:

- It is led by a Hanen Certified speech-language pathologist (SLP), who has received specialized training at a Hanen certification workshop

- It is offered to groups of parents (up to eight families per program)

- It has three major components:

  - a pre-program assessment and baseline videotaping of parent-child interaction

  - a minimum of 16 hours (six to eight sessions) of group training for parents; and

  - three individual video feedback sessions for each parent attending the program (parent-child interaction is videotaped by and reviewed with the SLP)

- It is supported by a user-friendly parent guidebook, as well as a companion DVD and detailed leaders guide for use by the SLP

Program Objectives

It Takes Two to Talk has three objectives: **parent education**; **early language intervention** and **social support**.

- **parent education** — parents learn some essential, basic concepts about communication and language — e.g., the development of communication; differences between expressive and receptive language; the importance of the child's active participation in frequent, extended turn-taking episodes. This knowledge helps parents better understand their child's stage of communication development and facilitates the setting of realistic communication goals. It also enhances parents' responsiveness to their children's communicative attempts.

- **early language intervention** — parents learn to apply language facilitation strategies flexibly across contexts so intervention becomes a natural part of parent-child interactions. Strategies highlighted by the SLP for individual parents are tied to their child's communication goals, which are developed collaboratively with the parents and modified over the course of the program. Since effective and consistent strategy use by parents is critical to the child's progress, video feedback sessions play a major role in helping parents modify their interactive behaviour. The focus of these sessions is on a) the SLP coaching the parent "on-line" to help her/ him

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apply strategies successfully during interactions with the child; and b) the shared viewing of the videotaped interaction, with the SLP guiding the discussion to increase the parent's awareness of her/his own interactive behaviour and its impact on the child. In addition, the SLP provides feedback on the parent's use of strategies and helps her/him identify metacognitive techniques that will facilitate consistent strategy use. These help parents "remember to remember."

- **social support** — this has been shown to have a positive impact on the well-being of the child and family when the child has a disability (Shilling et al. 2013). In *It Takes Two to Talk*, parents gain both formal and informal social support. The SLP, whose multi-faceted role includes that of group leader, interventionist, coach and counsellor provides more formal support. The parent group itself provides informal support through the sharing of experiences with individuals in similar situations, who can genuinely empathize. This constitutes a vitally important component of the program. The results of a study of consumer satisfaction by Girolametto, Tannock & Siegal (1993) confirmed the value parents place on the support they experienced during *It Takes Two to Talk*.

> " *It Takes Two to Talk* reflects a **family-centered model of intervention**, recognizing the child as part of a dynamic social system and the family as the most important element in a child's life. "

Theoretical Basis

Philosophical Foundation

It Takes Two to Talk reflects a **family-centered model of intervention**, recognizing the child as part of a dynamic social system and the family as the most important element in a child's life. This philosophical orientation recognizes the interrelatedness of the family system in that any action or event affecting one member of the family

unit affects them all (Rouse, 2012). The *family* is considered to be the client in an *It Takes Two to Talk* Program since it is widely recognized that without family involvement, intervention is unlikely to be successful and any short-term positive effects erode quite rapidly (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). In the *It Takes Two to Talk* Program, a collaborative, respectful partnership is built with parents, who are acknowledged as knowing their child best. Empowerment of parents involves supporting and strengthening their capacity to access knowledge and gain practical skills, which in turn, bolsters their sense of self-efficacy in relation to fostering their child's development (Dempsey & Dunst, 2004). This is the focus of *It Takes Two to Talk*.

In addition to having a family-centered focus, *It Takes Two to Talk* provides a **naturalistic approach to intervention**, which draws upon "strategies that identify and use opportunities for learning that occur throughout the child's natural activities, routines, and interactions; follow the child's lead; and use natural consequences" (Sheldon & Rush, 2001, p. 2). By learning to communicate in real-life situations, a child is better able to generalize newly learned communication skills to other situations. In addition, in contrast to direct treatment which is time limited and time specific, *It Takes Two to Talk* enables parents to make intervention a continual and ongoing process (Rossetti, 2001).

Theoretical Foundation

It Takes Two to Talk is based on a social-interactionist perspective of language acquisition, which views the development of communicative competence within a framework of early caregiver-child interactions (Bohannon & Bonvillian, 1997). This perspective views language acquisition as an interactive process in which the communicative behaviour of the parent influences the behaviour of the child and vice

versa (Sameroff & Fiese, 1990). This inter-active system may either encourage or inhibit the child's communication develop-ment, depending on many factors includ-ing the child's ability to provide clear behavioural cues and the responsiveness of the parent to the child's cues (Barnard, 1997; Stock, 2002).

The approach parents learn in an *It Takes Two to Talk* Program is based on the *responsivity* hypothesis. This hypothesis maintains that responsive language input which is contingent on the child's focus of interest and/or communicative behaviour, is simplified and has exaggerated prosody, is more easily processed, thereby permit-ting the child to redirect more cognitive resources to language learning (Dominey & Dodane, 2004; Weitzman, Girolametto & Drake, 2017). In addition, the adults' use of responsive language may promote the child's intrinsic motivation to inter-act and learn to communicate because responsiveness fosters a child's experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness — psychological needs that fuel intrin-sic motivation (Grolnick, Deci & Ryan, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Weitzman, Girolametto & Greenberg, 2006).

Responsiveness, which is reflected in the caregivers' prompt, positive and sensitive input that is contingent on the child's interest, has been associated with optimal child outcomes (Stock, 2002; Lloyd & Masur, 2014). Responsiveness has been associated with increased cognitive growth (Landry, Smith, Swank, Assel & Vellet, 2001), attachment security (Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2003) and better language development (Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein & Baumwell, 2001; Masur, Flynn & Eichorst, 2005).

There are three clusters of **Responsive Interaction Strategies** that are associated with the social interactive model of language intervention and which parents learn in *It Takes Two to Talk*: **child-oriented behaviours**; **interaction-promoting stra-tegies** and **language-modeling strategies** (Weitzman, 2017).

Responsive Interaction Strategies Parents Learn in *It Takes Two to Talk*

1. **Child-oriented behaviors** are designed to encourage the child to initiate interaction, thereby fostering frequent episodes of joint interaction around the child's interests — strategies include Observe, Wait and Listen™; Get Face to Face; Follow the Child's Lead by Joining In, Imitating, Interpreting and Commenting.

2. **Interaction-promoting strategies** are designed to foster balanced turn-taking between caregivers and children — strategies include Match Your Turns to Your Child's Turns; Cue your Child to Take a Turn; Ask Questions that Keep the Conversation Going.

3. **Language-modeling strategies** are designed to expand children's receptive and expressive language skills — strategies include Comment; Interpret; Match What you Say to What's Happening at the Moment; Repeat Important Words; Use a Variety of Words; Highlight Your Language; Expand your Child's Message.

Note: In addition to incidences where referenced, much of the information from this summary was adapted from: Weitzman, E., Girolametto, L., & Drake, L. (2017). Hanen Programs® for Parents: Parent Implemented Early Language Intervention. In McCauley, R. J., Fey, M. E. & Gillam, R. B. (2ed ed.), *Treatment of Language Disorders in Children* (pp. 27-56). Baltimore, MA: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Summary of Empirical Research

Four randomized controlled intervention studies have been conducted on children and their mothers who attended *It Takes Two to Talk* — The Hanen Program₍ for Parents.

The principle investigator for these studies was Dr. Luigi Girolametto, Associate Professor, Department of Speech-Language Pathology, University of Toronto.

Studies #1 and #2

Study #1	20 preschool children (22-62 mos) with developmental delays of mixed etiology, and their mothers (Girolametto, 1988)
Study #2	32 preschool children (14-60 mos) with developmental delays of mixed etiology, and their mothers (Tannock, Girolametto & Siegel, 1992)

In these two studies, changes in the interactive behaviour of mothers and children who had participated in *It Takes Two to Talk* (experimental group) were compared with those of a matched group of mothers and children in a delayed treatment control group, who were wait-listed for the *It Takes Two to Talk* program.

The following results were obtained from Studies #1 and #2:

■ *Decreased directiveness and increased responsiveness in mothers in the experimental group*

Mothers in the experimental group decreased their directiveness and increased their responsiveness, including use of commenting and contingent labeling. Follow-up measures used only in Study #2 found that, four months post-treatment, mothers in the experimental group maintained their gains.

■ *Increase in responsiveness, assertiveness and verbal turns of children in the experimental group*

Children in the experimental group demonstrated an increase in their social assertiveness and joint attention when compared with children in the control group. They also showed an improvement in their ability to take turns, both verbally and non-verbally, compared to the control group.

■ *Mother-child interactions in the experimental group were more balanced, frequent and longer-lasting*

Interactions between mothers and children in the experimental group were more balanced (mothers took fewer turns), lasted longer and occurred more frequently. This change was linked to changes in the mothers' interactive behaviour as a result of attending *It Takes Two to Talk*.

The changes in length and duration of interactive episodes have implications for vocabulary development since mothers' labeling during extended episodes has been shown to lead to growth in their children's receptive vocabulary, and to a much greater expansion in expressive vocabulary in older children (Tomasello & Farrar, 1986).

■ *Reports of improved family well-being*

Data obtained from parent questionnaires indicated secondary treatment effects on family functioning. These included positive changes in the children's behaviour and an enhanced parent-child relationship (Tannock & Girolametto, 1992).

Study #3

A Two-Year Study on the Efficacy of It Takes Two to Talk — *The Hanen Program® for Parents*

This study investigated the efficacy of *It Takes Two to Talk* — The Hanen Program® for Parents, adapted to include focused stimulation. It involved 25 children aged 23 to 33 months, all of whom had severe expressive language delays, and who had no more than 50 single words in their vocabularies (most had significantly fewer than 50 words). The study utilized a pre-test post-test control group design, with random assignment to an experimental group. The mothers in the experimental group participated in an *It Takes Two to Talk* Program (only mothers' data was used, although some fathers attended) and a delayed treatment control group was wait-listed for the program.

The program, which included parents' learning the same responsive strategies as in the other studies, included the assignment of ten target words to each child. These words represented objects or function words that were relevant and motivating for the child, had an initial phoneme the child could say and were developmentally appropriate. Parents were taught to use these words repetitively with their child during everyday interactions and daily routines. They also learned to set up and create new routines in which the words could be used repetitively.

The following results were obtained from Study #3:

■ *Mothers in the experimental group used target words spontaneously and repetitively, while reducing mean length of utterance*

Mothers who attended *It Takes Two to Talk* used the target words spontaneously and repetitively during interactions with their child compared with mothers in the control group. They also used fewer words per minute and shorter sentences. These changes in the mothers' interactive behaviour and language use were related to significant improvements in their children's language skills.

■ *The children in the experimental group demonstrated accelerated vocabulary and language development, compared with the control group*
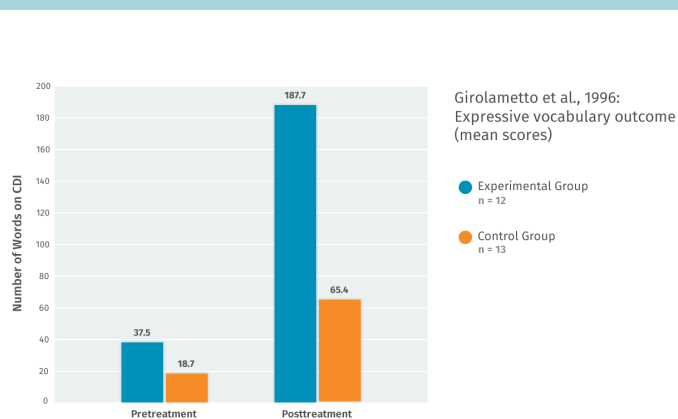
Compared with children in the control group, children whose mothers attended the *It Takes Two to Talk* Program demonstrated the following:

♦ Larger vocabularies
♦ Use a greater number of different words

♦ Use of more target words in interactive play contexts with their mothers
♦ Generalized use of target words to novel interaction partners in unfamiliar contexts
♦ Use of more structurally complete utterances and more multi-word utterances

These outcomes demonstrate that the changes in both mothers and children resulted from the *It Takes Two to Talk* Program. The program served to "kick start" the children's language development in that once the children were primed to learn new words, they learned the targeted words as well as other words to which they were exposed incidentally. In addition, once they began to talk more, they progressed rapidly to using longer phrases, suggesting continuity in development from single word use to the acquisition of word combinations (Girolametto, Pearce & Weitzman, 1996a, 1996b)

This study provides strong evidence of the short-term efficacy of this indirect model of service delivery (i.e., parent training using *It Takes Two to Talk*). The findings indicate that mothers' interactive behaviour may be optimized to provide an enriched language-learning environment for late talkers, thereby accelerating the children's vocabulary and language development (Girolametto et al., 1996b). Given that early oral language abilities influence the acquisition of reading and that children who exhibit early oral language delays are at risk for reading delays (Hammer et al., 2017), the results of this study confirm the importance of early intervention and that parent-focused intervention is an effective and ecologically sound approach to the provision of such intervention (Girolametto et al., 1996b).

Girolametto et al., 1996: Expressive vocabulary outcome (mean scores)

● Experimental Group n = 12

● Control Group n = 13

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Study #4

Study on efficacy of* It Takes Two to Talk*, incorporating focused stimulation, for children with Down Syndrome

A subsequent study of the efficacy of the focused stimulation version of *It Takes Two to Talk* was conducted on twelve children with Down Syndrome (29-46 months) and their mothers. The children communicated using single words or signs, with no combinations. Consistent with the other studies, positive effects were documented for mothers' interactive behaviour. In addition, in comparison with the control group, children in the experimental group used more target words (signed or spoken) both during free play with their mothers and according to a parent questionnaire (Girolametto, Weitzman & Clements-Baartman, 1998).

Conclusion

It Takes Two to Talk is one of the most well-known and most researched early language intervention programs (McCauley & Fey, 2006). Grounded in evidence and consistent with best practice in terms of utilization of naturalistic contexts and a family-centered approach, *It Takes Two to Talk* empowers parents to build on their existing strengths and acquire new skills. Helpgiving of this kind allows parents to experience greater positive control over their own and their child's lives (Dempsey & Dunst, 2004). *It Takes Two to Talk* provides SLPs with an evidence-based approach, supported by user-friendly resources that can be implemented with families of young children, who have language delays.

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About the author of *It Takes Two to Talk Program Resources*

Elaine Weitzman, M.Ed., is a speech-language pathologist and Executive Director of The Hanen Centre. She is also Adjunct Professor in the University of Toronto's Speech-Language Pathology Department. Over the past 30 years, Ms. Weitzman has been involved in the development and dissemination of Hanen Programs, and has co-authored several Hanen guidebooks. She has conducted research on the efficacy of Hanen Programs and on caregiver-child interactions in collaboration with Dr. Luigi Girolametto, Professor in the Department of Speech-Language Pathology at the University of Toronto. This extensive body of research has informed speech-language pathologists' practice in relation to working with parents and educators and has been widely published.

Available *It Takes Two to Talk* Resources

The fifth edition of the *It Takes Two to Talk* guidebook (Weitzman, 2017) is available in English. The fourth edition (Pepper & Weitzman, 2004) is available in English, French, Spanish, Dutch and Danish.

PARENT GUIDEBOOK

DVD

The Hanen Centre enables parents and professionals to transform their daily interactions with young children to build the best possible lifelong social, language and literacy skills.

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