

## Some Halloween Safety tips from Rogers Pumpkin Patrol:

- 1 Make sure you're seen – wear a reflective item.
- 2 Use face make-up, or enlarge the eyes if you're wearing a mask.



## Parents can help researchers evaluate language skills in autistic children

Study conclusion: Parents are key in a new measure to evaluate language in children with autism.

Researchers: University of Waterloo developmental psychologist Daniela O'Neill.

Study focus: A new parent questionnaire, developed at the University of Waterloo, will help health practitioners to gauge the acquisition of language skills in children with autism.

The pioneering Language Use Inventory (LUI) is among a set of measures for evaluating spoken language development in children with autism spectrum disorders, recommended by an expert panel.

The experts' report appears in the June 2009 issue of the Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research. The report was commissioned by the National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

"This report will be of tremendous help to researchers, clinicians and speech-language professionals involved in intervention with children with autism and we are very proud to see the LUI included among the measures recommended for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions that target spoken language," said O'Neill, who created the Language Use Inventory.

It's a standardized questionnaire that asks parents about their child's use of language in many different kinds of settings.

Research from the Centers for Disease Control in the U.S. suggests the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders to be one in 100 children.

The inventory "looks at pragmatic language development, which has to do with how young children are able to use their language effectively and successfully in everyday interactions with other people in ways that are age-appropriate and typical," O'Neill said.

"For example, to ask for help, comment about noticeable things, tease, tell stories and give others information they might need. Pragmatics of language can be an area of great difficulty for children with autism."

Difficulty with learning language and communicating with others is often one of the first things that parents become concerned about. Parents have much valuable information on their child's language use to share with professionals evaluating their child.

The Language Use Inventory provides a new tool to evaluate a young child's broad pragmatic use of language. As many as 10% of preschool-age children in Canada and the U.S. may be at risk for language disorders.

The inventory is the product of more than eight years of research funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. In a recent study, more than 3,500 parents from across Canada completed the questionnaire describing their child's language ability.

"This study will help us understand unexplored ways of identifying language skills in children with autism," said Michael Krar, director at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

The inventory allows a comparison of a child's score with children of the same age -- similar to height and weight charts used by doctors.

Family practitioners in Kitchener and Waterloo are involved in preliminary studies looking at its use in doctors' offices.

"The tremendous response we had from parents all across Canada has allowed us to provide norms for the LUI at every month from 47 months of age," O'Neill said.

"I think the issue of how children learn language is just as fascinating to parents as to researchers and also many parents can understand the anxiety of wondering if perhaps a child is experiencing language difficulties or may be falling significantly behind their peers."

For information: Visit <http://www.childstudies.uwaterloo.ca>.

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