

# FIVE dangerous *words*

RABBI YAAKOV AICHENBAUM

**AS** a special education teacher, I often hear parents and mechanchim utter five dangerous words: “Maybe it will go away.” After all, why invest time and resources into fixing a problem that might correct itself in time. As in many areas of life, a cost-risk analysis has to be made.

Waiting saves money, does not interfere with the classroom routine, and has no stigma. However, it can also squander valuable time, cause a child to be years behind academically and contribute to low self-esteem. This is especially true with boys. If the requisite language skills are not in place by the time they start learning Gemara, Gemara can mark the beginning of a downward spiral.

Parents often consult with their child’s teacher to see how their child is performing in class. It is important for teachers to respond based on “authentic assessments.” Just because a child is passing the class does not mean there are no issues. For example, some children have better recognition memory than recall memory. Therefore, they might do better on a multiple choice test than on a fill in the blank test. Such children could pass all the tests but still not be able to translate a passuk by themselves. Master teachers use a variety of testing formats in order to obtain an accurate assessment of the child’s performance.

Teachers also have to be careful not to minimize parental concerns by comparing the child to his siblings or other students who had weaknesses that self-corrected in time. Each student is unique and needs to be evaluated on his own merits. While intuition can play an important role, actual data is vital as well. If a teacher does not possess enough actual evidence of a student’s real progress, then perhaps the teacher or another individual should evaluate the student’s mastery of the classroom material and basic language skills.

**MY EXPERIENCE** is that children who exhibit certain “red flags” should be assessed and monitored to

determine if remediation is appropriate:

- Difficulty acquiring the mechanics of kria
- Difficulty in learning to read English
- Difficulty translating basic Chumash words
- Kria is worse when translating pessukim

The mind is most flexible through the third grade. Early intervention not only prevents many problems that can result from waiting too long, but it also taps into the most opportune time to teach language skills to children. Remediation can also help older children and teenagers tremendously, but the effect is geometrically enhanced when the intervention is done early on. Time really is of the essence. Therefore, primary grade teachers should give much credence to parental intuition. While parents might not be educators, they do know their children. If a parent has a feeling that there is something academically amiss with their child, their concerns should be given credence and not be dismissed flippantly.

Once the decision is made to provide remediation, it is important to choose someone who can identify the areas of weakness and who has a concrete plan and methodology for correcting them. Considerable time and money can be spent on well-meaning tutors who do not understand the child’s issues or how to address them. A qualified instructor who knows how to help the child gain the skills that he is missing is well worth the price and will save considerable resources in the long-term. B’ezras Hashem, no child should need remediation, but getting the right help when it is needed can make an incredible difference in a child’s life. *U*

*Rabbi Yaakov Aichenbaum teaches kria, Chumash & Gemara to students with learning difficulties in Baltimore as well as to online students around the world. He also presents professional development programs for mechanchim in schools and national conferences. He welcomes your feedback at [yaakov@ybm.edu](mailto:yaakov@ybm.edu) or (410) 358-0526.*

