

Preschool Speech & Language Development (Part II)

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Some children are slower to use words

Most parents realize that there are vast differences in children's development in all areas. Some children crawl before others, while some children sit before others, and there are some children who achieve most developmental milestones before others. There are many factors which influence when a child will begin to use his or her first word. If a child is beginning to show signs of frustration about being unable to make others understand his or her needs or wants, parents should consult with a family physician or a speech-language pathologist.

Why do some children have difficulties learning to talk?

There is rarely one single reason for a child's speech and language to be delayed. In most cases, there are many factors, which combine in a way which interferes with normal speech and language development. Some of these factors which affect speech and language are: hearing loss (due to ear infections or permanent conditions); mouth formations (which interfere with correct speech); movements of the mouth (also interfere with correct speech); language delay (which interfere with the learning of words and rules for forming sentences); genetic factors (abilities which are inherited from family members); and, poor speaking habits (which are repeated and practised incorrectly). If a child is showing any of these factors and you have concerns about their speech and language, it is important to have the problem identified as early as possible. When a problem is detected and treated early, the impact on the child and the family is lessened.

When is a child's speech and language considered delayed?

Because children develop at different rates, it is often difficult to determine whether a child's speech and language is delayed or "just a little behind the rest". Parents should be concerned about their child's speech and language development when:

- The child has had ear infections for six months or longer,
- The child's speech is not understood by other children or people outside of the family,
- The child shows signs of frustration about not being understood by others.

If your child shows any of these signs, contact your family physician or a speech-language pathologist.

What will a speech-language pathologist do?

A speech-language pathologist will evaluate your child's ability to communicate by asking you questions about your child and by observing and testing your child's speech and language development. The assessment may take more than one visit, depending on your child's attention span. Following the evaluation, the speech-language pathologist will discuss the results with you and provide some recommendations for treating your child.

These recommendations may include:

- Techniques and activities for parents to do at home,
- Parents attending some training sessions, where the speech-language pathologist will demonstrate techniques for parents to do at home,
- Your child attending therapy sessions, where the speech-language pathologist will use techniques to help the development of the child's speech and language.

You can learn more about specific techniques for helping the development of the child's speech and language in PRESCHOOL SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT (Part III).

Reference source for articles: Parent Articles 1: Enhance parent involvement in language development, edited by Margaret Schrader, Ph. D., (1988).

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