

Warning Signs for Speech and/or Language Development Problems

Although children develop at different rates, most follow a general guideline of developmental norms. These guidelines are very general, and as a parent you know your child best. However, if you sense that there is a problem with your child's speech and/or language skills it is always wise to seek a professional opinion. Unfortunately, there is no universal age at which parents should seek professional advice for speech or language problem because every child is so unique (Hamaguchi, 2001). With the presence of a speech and/or language difficulty, parents may see a change in their child's behavior. If the child is unable to communicate his/her wants and needs, the child can get frustrated and may begin to act out. The following is a list of some warning signs of a possible speech or language problem as listed in Childhood Speech, Language, and Listening Problems by Patricia McAleer Hamaguchi:

BIRTH TO 12 MONTHS

- Avoids eye contact
- Limited babbling
- Shows little emotion
- Does not turn head or react to sounds
- Limited or no imitation of sounds
- No evidence of first true word(s)
- Does not try to communicate using gestures or actions

12 TO 18 MONTHS

- Avoids eye contact
- Unable to follow one-step directions
- Unable to point to body parts when asked
- Does not say "Mama" or "Dada"

18-24 MONTHS

- Avoids eye contact
- Difficulty pointing to objects/pictures
- Mostly quiet, minimal initiation of producing words
- Does not use words to communicate

24-36 MONTHS

- Avoids eye contact
- Difficulty imitating nursery rhymes
- Does not put two- or three-word phrases together
- Difficult to understand when talking
- Does not ask or answer simple questions
- Plays alone; does not engage in pretend play

PRESCHOOL AGE (3 TO 5 YEARS OLD)

- Difficulty comprehending directions
- Difficult to understand when communicating
- Speaks in short phrases instead of complete sentences
- Leaves off endings of words
- Leaves out words such as “is” and “the”
- Does not use words to communicate; instead uses gestures or noises

SCHOOL AGE (5 TO 12 YEARS OLD)

- Difficulty with reading, writing and/or spelling
- Difficulty with topic maintenance
- Exhibits difficulty with comprehension of orally presented information
- Requires repetition of directions
- Difficulty retelling a story; uses simple language
- Difficulty remembering information
- May display social or behavioral problems

If you notice that your child is exhibiting any of these warning signs, please contact your pediatrician to voice your concerns. You can also contact your local Speech-Language Pathologist to discuss your child’s speech and/or language development.

Below is a list of suggested reading for parents regarding speech and language:

- 1 Childhood Speech, Language and Listening Problems: What Every Parent Should Know by Patricia McAleer Hamaguchi
- 2 The Child with Special Needs: Encouraging Intellectual and Emotional Growth by Stanley I. Greenspan, M.D.
- 3 The New Language of Toys: Teaching Communication Skills to Children with Special Needs, a guide for parents and teachers by Joan E. Heller Miller, et al

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