

Speech Delay or Speech Disorder?

So you think your child's speech and language development may be coming in a little slow? Those cute babbles have yet to turn into clear words, as she is about to enter pre-school. But, how do you know it's a speech disorder, rather than a simple speech delay? And, if indeed it is a speech disorder, what does that mean? Will my child be able to communicate effectively, will she be able to read, participate in class and most importantly, gain self-confidence? These are just some of the questions parents face as their child begins to learn speech patterns and language skills as a toddler.

Starting the research process of what to do if your child has a speech disorder can be overwhelming and frustrating. There are many ways to help you identify specific speech issues and provide you with tools and information on how and where to get help.

What is a speech disorder?

Speech disorders can affect the way a person creates sounds. These sounds help us to form words and are necessary for communication with other people. Speech disorders can affect both adults and children. While toddlers learn language skills at different rates, most follow a general timeline of development. If your child doesn't seem to be meeting communication milestones, you will want to bring it up with your pediatrician. While it may be a simple speech delay, recognizing and treating the problem early is crucial for developing language and other cognitive skills in the long run. The general timetable for speech development is broad, and your child may run into small roadblocks along the way. The important thing to remember is something seems wrong, trust your instincts. Nobody knows your child as well as you do, so don't be afraid to ask your doctor if you think your child's speech and language skills are not developing normally.

Language Building Milestones

Here are the general speech and language-building milestones to be aware of, up to the age of 2. Talk to your child's doctor if your child exhibits any of the symptoms below:

By 12 months:

- Doesn't say "mama" or "dada"
- Doesn't use gestures such as waving, shaking her head, or pointing
- Doesn't understand and respond to words such as "no" and "bye-bye"
- Isn't pointing out things of interest such as a bird or airplane overhead
- Doesn't say single words between 12 and 15 months

By 18 months:

- Doesn't point to at least one body part when asked
- Isn't somehow communicating to you when she needs help with something or pointing to what she wants
- Doesn't say at least 6 words

Between 19 and 24 months:

- Doesn't have a rapidly growing vocabulary (about one new word a week)

By 24 months:

- Doesn't respond to simple directions
- Doesn't pretend with her dolls or herself (like brushing her hair or feeding her doll)
- Can't point to named pictures in a book
- Can't join two words together
- Doesn't know the function of common household objects (like a toothbrush or fork)