My Child Doesn't Talk Like (or As Much As) His Peers
Will he outgrow this?

by Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed.

We learn to talk naturally by repeating what we hear, see, understand, and remember. When parents compare their children's speech or language skills to those of their little peers, they can see quickly if their child "measures up." As parents, if you see distinct (or even subtle) differences in your child's language skills (speech, language, and listening) as compared to their peers, you may want to seek a professional's opinion. Never assume a child will "outgrow" anything; it's better to be safe than sorry. If a professional determines that your child has problems with his/her speech or language, the earlier he/she receives therapy, the better.

Sometimes children improve their language skills on their own, especially with the pronunciations of words, but it never hurts to get a professional's opinion. Research tells us that early identification of language delays gives children a better chance of developing pre-reading and academic skills. Young children are less aware of having a speech-language problem than older children. Before realizing that their speech is "different," speech-language pathologists (SLPs) can sometimes remediate the problem(s) before children realize they have one. Assessing and treating children before entering school gives them time to adapt to their "new" speech and language patterns. Some children may not need to continue therapy after they enter school.

Sometimes, in trying to help their child "catch up" to the language skills of their peers, parents may unintentionally hinder their child's speech/language problem(s), if there is one, by insisting that they imitate sounds or words before they are *developmentally* ready. Under the direction of an SLP, parents can learn *how* to help their children with age-appropriate tasks without causing unnecessary frustration or loss of self-esteem.

Is there a "right" age for seeking help?

There is no "right" age to seek help because all children are developmentally unique. Some lesser problems with speech and language become noticeable only after the child gets older. An SLP will observe and assess your child and compare him/her to children who are developing normally for that age. Within that framework, the SLP will determine if your child presents typical, maturational speech and language patterns or is sending up red flags or warning signs.
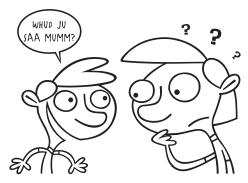
A child with speech, language, or listening problems is at a disadvantage upon entering school. Problems with these skills affect the child's ability to: follow directions, understand basic concepts, exercise good auditory skills and memory, learn new words, understand the plot of a story and make up new ones. Getting help beforehand is not a guarantee of academic success, but early intervention gives the child a positive head start on correcting his/her problem(s).

What are the *warning signs* that a child may have problems with speech and/or language?

Parents have a "gut feeling" or know when something "isn't right" with their child. Usually these feelings are justified. The following warning signs may help parents determine if there is cause to pursue a professional screening or assessment. *Receptive skills* (what we understand) and *expressive skills* (saying what we want, need, or think) paint the big picture of your child's language skills.
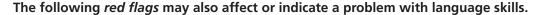
Receptive skills include**:**

- Following directions.

- Understanding what others are saying.

- Remembering what he/she is supposed to do.

- Developing relationships and participating in social situations.

- Comprehending simple words that he/she can read.

- Understanding stories read aloud.

Expressive skills include:

- Initiating and participating in conversation.

- Answering questions with sufficient details.

- Putting sentences together with the right words in the right order.

- Naming people, places, and things correctly.

- Naming things using the correct word (Everything they drink isn't *"juice."*)

- Telling how to do something in the correct sequence.

The following *red flags* may also affect or indicate a problem with language skills.

- Frequent ear infections

- Poor or antisocial behavior

- Poor listening skills

- Poor self-esteem

- Avoids eye contact

- Babbles or is unusually quiet

- Speaks in broken phrases or leaves out words in sentences

- Speaks in a way that is difficult to understand

- Speaks differently from other children the same age

- Seem disinterested or detached from his/her peers

- Watches others to see what he/she should be doing

Parents, if you observe any of the red flags or warning signs listed above, you may be detecting the presence of a possible speech, language, or listening problem or disorder. Contact the speech-language pathologist in your school and share your concerns. In Canada, consult your physician if your child has not yet entered school. Each province has a different protocol for children in school.

References

Hamaguchi, Patricia M. 2001. C*hildhood Speech, Language & Listening Problems: What Every Parent Should Know,* 2nd ed., John Wiley& Sons, Inc., Canada, 2001, pages 20-28.

National Institute of Health. MedlinePlus Encyclopedia. *Language Disorder-Children*. Updated March 12, 2013. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001545.htm Retrieved April, 2013.

SERVE Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Stepping Stones to Literacy: *Communication.* http://center.serve.org/ss/commreceptive.php Retrieved April, 2013.

More FREE Handy Handouts®, go to www.handyhandouts.com

Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit www.superduperinc.com and type in the item name or number in our search engine. Click the links below to see the product descriptions.

Story Maker App (Free)
http://www.superduperinc.com/apps/apple.aspx

Let's Name Things App (Free)
http://www.superduperinc.com/apps/apple.aspx

Turtle Talk
Item# GB-137

Photo Articulation Castle App
http://www.superduperinc.com/apps/apple.aspx

How? Fun Deck or App
Item# FD-50

How Would You Feel If... or App
Item# FD-117