

Learn to Detect Children's Language Problems

Learning to speak is a truly human function.

Infants begin to communicate at birth and grow in the complexity and diversity of their messages.

Each child's learning style and communication ability is different, but there are many similarities between children. These similarities are what help the speech-and-language pathologist identify which children are expanding their communication skills and which children may need some help.

Parents can make an informal assessment of their children's speech, language, and literacy skills and determine whether the child's physician should take a closer look at the development.

Infancy

Children should make crying and non-crying sounds, look towards noises, and imitate some facial expressions, such as smiling and sticking out their tongue. Babbling begins about the second to third month.

12-18 Months

Even though a child's words may not mean anything to strangers at this time, you will be able to recognize at least one to three words that they use consistently. They will also startle at loud noises and look in the direction of their parent's voices.

18-24 Months

Vocabulary will boom in this period. They may have as many as 100 words and will fill their speech with nonsense jargon to make sentences that sound like Mom's and Dad's. About one-quarter of their words will be understood by strangers. They can follow simple spoken directions, such as "Put the cup on the table".

2-3 Years

Children will understand about 300 words and should be able to carry out many simple requests. Some two-year-olds have a larger vocabulary and can carry on simple conversations. Others may still be using simple words and sentence fragments. Anything in this range is normal as long as your child is understanding language.

3-4 Years

At age three, children can understand some concepts of time like "yesterday", "summer", "after dinner", etc. and will begin to obey commands such as "hang your coat on the chair". They know their first and last name, sex, name of the street where they live, and can recite several nursery rhymes.

Vocabulary is about 1,000 words. They use sentences with 3 to 4 words each. Strangers may have some difficulty understanding their speech. The family can make sense out of most sentences even though a few sounds are not pronounced consistently.

4-5 Years

At four years, children can ask many questions and will listen to the answer. They use the contractions "It's a" or "there's a"; use the past tense; and can speak of imaginary conditions, "suppose that...", or "I hope that", etc. Most speech will be understood by strangers but they may still be having difficulty with "r" and sticking out their tongue for "s". These articulation errors occasionally disappear but it's wise to consult a speech-and-language pathologist if a child is self-conscious about their speech.

5 Years

Five-year-olds have a vocabulary of approximately 2,000 words and speak in five-to-six word sentences. They know common opposites like “big/little” and “hard/soft”; understand “same” and “different”; and use future, present, and past tenses. They can tell a story with a plot and ask questions for information. They can make up complex sentences, such as “I can go outside on the swings after I pick up my toys.”

School-age children

At the end of first grade, children can tell you most of the sounds that the alphabet letters make, can copy the letters, and read some words like “hill”, “basket”, “want”, etc. They can understand the silliness of the statement “My bird blows bubbles when it swims in the fishbowl.” They should be able to listen to short stories, recall the main ideas of the story and retell it in their own words.

Third-grade level to high school

Many children who have been relying upon strong visual memory skills to assist them with reading and spelling find third grade very difficult. Some children seem to have a more difficult time learning to spell and read.

These same children may begin to get in trouble for fidgeting and disrupting the class. Some behavior problems are consequences of an underlying processing problem. The disruptive child may not be processing efficiently the auditory information being presented and consequently has a more difficult time staying connected with the teacher.

If your child has a behavior problem, is two years or more below grade level in reading and spelling, or seems to be unable to remember plots to stories just read or heard, a speech-language evaluation is indicated.

This evaluation should include an assessment of oral and written language skills, auditory conceptualization, and language comprehension ability.

High School to College

Many students have learned to decode or read the words, but complain that what they read seems to be lost before they get to the end of the page. Their parents may have complained that, as a child, instructions given seemed to have gone in one ear and out the other. These are examples of language comprehension problems. Being able to read the words doesn't mean automatic understanding of what has been read.

Treatment is available to teach picturing, or visualization, of what is read and then connect those images for improved comprehension and direction following. A comprehension problem can be present at any age—from early childhood to adult—and can be a most debilitating problem for some people.

People with severe comprehension problems may not even be aware that they are misunderstanding what people are telling them. They may show up for appointments at the wrong time, or day, or may not be able to follow oral directions to a new place. They may have problems with relationships with people because they are unable to remember important details or facts from conversations. They may need to have tasks at work explained over and over. This is not a problem of inattention, but a problem with basic language processing.

Early detection and treatment of hearing, speech, and language problems can prevent many educational and learning problems in later years.

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