

Speech and Language Spotlight on: Toddlers



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Better Hearing & Speech Month

Tantrums are not the only explosions occurring during the toddler years. Speech and language skills are advancing at breakneck pace. A child generally says just a few words at 12 months, but by 18 months, they may be speaking 20 or more. By 24 months, they may say 50 or more words and should be putting two words together.

A Hint of Doubt: This is a time when parents may have their first concerns about their child's ability to communicate effectively. Perhaps a child is 18 months old and hasn't spoken more than one or two words. Or doesn't seem to know her name. Or seems far behind other kids her age. Parents should trust their instincts.

Speech and Language Disorders in Toddlers: Toddlers may experience problems with their speech, language, or both.

- **Speech is the ability to produce speech sounds using the mouth, lips, and tongue.** A child may say sounds the wrong way, repeat sounds and words, or be otherwise difficult to understand. Although mistakes are common as a child learns to speak, familiar people should understand a child's speech by the time the child reaches age 3—and most people should understand a child's speech by the time he or she reaches age 4.
- **Language is the ability to use and put words together—and to understand others' words.** A child may have trouble understanding questions, following directions, or naming objects.

"Late Bloomer"—or Language Disorder? All children go through the same stages as their speech and language develops. However, it is hard to know exactly when each child will get to each stage. There is a range for typical development. For children ages 18–30 months who aren't talking much, here are some factors to consider:

- **Hearing.** Has the child's hearing been screened? Checking for hearing loss is important because it can affect speech and language development.
- **Understanding language.** Does a child follow simple directions or point to an object when asked? If a child seems to understand well, they are more likely to catch up on language skills.
- **Using gestures.** Does the child wave "hi" or "bye" and put their arms up to be picked up? If children use meaningful gestures to communicate, they are more likely to catch up.
- **Learning new words.** A child may be slower to talk, but they should still try to use new words each month. If a child is not using new words very often, that is a red flag.

No Guesswork Necessary. An evaluation by a speech-language pathologist can determine whether there is an issue that requires treatment or if a child will likely catch up on their own. **Early speech and language treatment sets a child up for future school and social success.** Parents can find these professionals through their local early intervention program or school system. A searchable database of private speech-language pathologists is available at www.asha.org/profind.



Speech-language pathologists can help!

Learn more at www.asha.org/public



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