



# SPEECH IN FOCUS Speech Pathology Services

Changing the individual's life and enhancing their world.

Are you worried your child might be slow to talk?  
Are you unsure if it is a problem?  
Why don't you ask a speech pathologist?



You've probably heard that the early years of your child's life are the most important for building strong language skills. That's because your child's brain is developing extremely fast during this time, and he's more open to learning and ready for enriching experiences than he will ever be.

From birth to 5 years of age, children learn language by having back-and-forth interactions with the important adults in their lives. When a child sends a message, whether it is a gesture, a sound, or a word, his parents' responses are important. They reinforce and encourage his learning. This responsive feedback is an essential ingredient in the language-learning process for every child.

But if a child is communicating less than others his age, he's unlikely to receive as much of this essential feedback. Because he isn't talking, adults naturally communicate with him less, so he doesn't get the helpful input he needs to build his language skills. Since children with delayed speech or language delays can't participate fully during activities and conversations, they may fall even further behind if they are not provided with the help they need.

This is why it's so important not to wait if you see any sign that your child's communication development may be delayed. Some parents are advised that their child will likely "grow out of it", and they simply wait for the child to catch up. But a "wait and see" approach means that precious time can be lost during this critical learning phase.

## How do I know if I should speak to a speech pathologist?

The earlier a child receives the help she needs, the better her communication and language outcome will be.

Look for the following signs...

### By 12 months

- Doesn't babble with changes in tone – e.g. Dadadadadadadada
- Doesn't use gestures like waving “bye bye” or shaking head for “no”
- Doesn't respond to her/his name
- Doesn't communicate in some way when s/he needs help with something

### By 15 months

- Doesn't understand and respond to words like "no" and "up"
- Says no words
- Doesn't point to objects or pictures when asked “Where's the...?”
- Doesn't point to things of interest as if to say “Look at that!” And then look right at you

### By 18 months

- Doesn't understand simple commands like "Don't touch"
- Isn't using at least 20 single words like "Mummy" or "up"
- Doesn't respond with a word or gesture to a question such as “What's that? Or “Where's your shoe?”
- Can't point to two or three major body parts such as head, nose, eyes, feet.

### By 24 months

- Says fewer than 100 words
- Isn't consistently joining two words together like "Daddy go" or “ shoes on”
- Doesn't imitate actions or words.
- Doesn't pretend with toys, such as feeding doll or making toy man drive toy car

### By 30 months

- Says fewer than 300 words
- Isn't using action words like “run”, “eat”, “fall”
- Isn't using some adult grammar, such as “two babies” and “doggie sleeping”
- Has only some sounds.

### By 3-4 years

- Isn't using sentences (e.g., "I don't want that" or "My truck is broken") by three years
- Isn't able to tell a simple story by four or five years
- Can't be understood by family.
- Doesn't ask questions by 3 years

## A story about a mum who didn't wait

Emma was 15 months old when her mum, Rebecca, noticed that she wasn't using as many words as other children her age. She knew that Emma hadn't met some of the milestones for her age.

But Rebecca's family told her not to worry about it since Emma's father had a speech delay when he was younger and Rebecca herself had been a late talker. They said it was probably just genetic and that she should wait it out.

Another three months passed and Rebecca was becoming more and more worried about her daughter's language development. If Emma did have a delay, Rebecca decided that she wanted to make sure she was doing everything she could to help her catch up before the delay became more severe.

*With the speech pathologist, Emma's mother, Rebecca learned simple strategies she could use with Emma to help her use words and build her vocabulary.*

By making small but important changes to her style of interaction, Rebecca gave Emma the boost she needed to start using more words and interact more readily with others. Within a very short time, Emma was using more words and became much more willing to talk to others. She continued to progress and is now talking like other children her age.

When asked what advice she would give other parents whose children seem to be slow to talk, Rebecca said,

*"If you have any type of concern, [have your child assessed by a speech-language pathologist]. Even if it amounts to nothing, at least you know that you called and that there is nothing to worry about."*

*"I really see how it benefited Emma – and not only Emma, but our family as well. Now we know how to better interact with her and we're seeing a big difference in her personality. She's more outgoing with other kids now and not as shy. We saw a big difference, not only in her speech, but in other areas as well".*

