



Shoreline Speech Therapy

Early Communication Development and Late Talkers

Early Speech and Language Development

Anyone who spends time around children knows how quickly they change during their first months and years. Although each child is certainly unique in when they start to show new skills, there are certain milestones that we expect them to achieve by certain ages.



2-3 months | Cooing and Gooing

Your baby is cooing and going – making sounds that are made in the back of the mouth ('guh', 'ooo'). Communication is not yet 'intentional' – for a specific purpose – but they are taking in a lot through their experiences with other people and their environment!



4-6 months | Babbling

Infants are continuing to experiment with making sounds like squeals and raspberries. They start to make syllables with consonants like 'bah'. They also imitate some sounds that adults make.



7-9 months | Mama! Dada!

Children are beginning to understand a few words and simple requests from adults. They are imitating more speech sounds and repeating them in sequence ('bawbaw'). This is when they might start saying 'mama' or 'dada'. They are intentionally using gestures to communicate specific messages and using sounds to get adults' attention.



10-12 months | Growing Understanding and their First Word

In the months before their first birthday, babbling becomes more varied, with strings of different syllables ('teetuhkay'). Your child may say one or more words. They understand the word 'no', respond to simple questions, and their own name!



13-15 months | First Words

By this age, toddlers can usually say 5-10 words. They can point to things when asked 'where' it is, and answer 'what's this?' questions about familiar objects. Their language skills are really budding!



16-18 months | Combining Words

By 18 months, toddlers can say about 50 words, including 'I' and 'mine'. They're also starting to combine these words into two-word phrases ('want cookie'). They can also follow simple one-step directions ('wipe your face').



2 – 2 ½ years | Early Sentences

By 2 years, children generally have 200-300 words, and by 2 ½, they have about 450 words! They are combining these words into phrases and partial sentences. They are using some grammatical features such as adding *-ing* to verbs ('sleeping'), using some location words ('in', 'on'), marking plurals with *-s* ('cookies'), and saying 'no' and 'not'. They are able to say more speech sounds; a stranger would understand at least 50% of their speech. You'll be translating for a couple more years, but they should be 100% understandable to a stranger by age 5!

Speech vs Language

Although people usually don't distinguish between these two terms, to speech and language professionals, they mean very different things! *Speech* refers to the sounds that we make.

'cat' has three sounds – 'k', 'ah', and 't'

Language refers to the meaning of words and how we combine these words.

'cat' refers to a furry animal

'the cat is sleeping' means that this furry animal is getting some rest at this moment

Late Talkers

A 'Late Talker' is a child who is around 18 to 30 months old and isn't meeting his or her *language production* milestones; their *expressive* language is delayed. These children usually have good *understanding* of language, and have typical play, social, motor, and cognitive skills otherwise. Their *speech sounds* may also be developing normally. Professionals who work with young children watch for signs that they may be a Late Talker. Some of these signs are described in the table below.

Age	Late Talker	Typical Milestone
18-20 months	says less than 24 words	by 18 mos, says 50 words is combining these words into two-word phrases ('want cookie')
21-24 months	says less than 40 words	by 24 mos, says 200-300 words
24-30 months	says less than 100 words is not using several word combinations	by 30 months, says 450 words is putting these words into phrases and short sentences

Risk Factors

These children may also have a history that puts them at risk for a language delay. These risk factors include the following:

- quiet baby; limited babbling
- family history of speech, language, or learning difficulties
- ear infections
- limited consonant sounds
- limited pretend play
- mild comprehension delay
- uses few gestures
- does not copy words or phrases when cued ('say *more*')
- mostly uses nouns (people, places, things) with few verbs (action words)
- trouble playing with other children
- expressive language changes very slowly

He'll 'Grow Out of It'

Unfortunately, there is a misconception that all Late Talkers will 'grow out of it'. Some children will continue to have trouble with language and will eventually be diagnosed with a Developmental Language Delay. Others will appear to 'grow out of it' – catching up to their peers by grade primary – but persisting difficulties will emerge with reading, and later in elementary school and high school as expectations for spoken and written language become more complex. Also, at this stage in grade primary, they may score in the range of 'normal', but their scores are in the *lower* part of that range. Finally, other children catch up to their peers, and continue to have typical language development.

Getting the Facts About Your Child and Taking Action

The best thing you can do as a parent is to have your child assessed by a speech-language pathologist (S-LP) so you can make *informed* decisions. You'll find out how your child's development compares to other children their age. You'll learn what their strengths are, and what their areas of weakness are. You'll be taught how to change your own language and the way you interact with your child – the strategies that clinicians and researchers have found to help Late Talkers most. Your child's S-LP will have recommendations about how to monitor their development and provide intervention for your child if necessary.

Where do I Find an S-LP in my Area?

S-LPs work in both the public health system and in private practice. In the public system, services for preschoolers are provided by the Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres across the province (www.nshsc.nshealth.ca). Private practitioners work in clinics or see clients in their homes. They can be found through the Speech and Hearing Association of Nova Scotia (www.shans.ca/our-professionals/). Private services are often covered in part by insurance plans.



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