

Speech and Language FAQ

Many children who are referred to our early intervention services are experiencing some kind of difficulty with language or communication skills. Often many parents have the same questions about why their child is not yet talking or is hard to understand. Here are some answers to questions we see asked frequently:

Is my child not talking because I don't make him?

Probably not. The desire to communicate with others is something we are all born with. Most of the time, children learn to talk just from being in their environment and being exposed to language.

However, when a child is delayed in their communication skills, they may have difficulty in learning how to effectively use words to communicate with others. When this happens, parents are usually very good at helping their children be efficient communicators in other ways; for example, they may help their child learn to point in order to communicate.

My mom told me that I should just not give him what he wants until he says the word. Will that help?

Probably not. If your child does not already use words to communicate, he won't be able to use words to ask for what he wants even if he wants to. Children need lots of practice hearing and using words before they learn them well enough to use them "on demand."

Imagine if we put a small baby on the floor and refused to give them what they wanted until they walked to you. If the child hasn't already had a lot of practice walking, this would be impossible. A child who is newly learning to talk is the same way.

Why is my child so much harder to understand than other kids her age?

All children younger than three are "new talkers." That is, they are all learning a language for the first time. When we are newly learning it takes a lot of time and practice to learn how to pronounce all the sounds and words correctly.



Many children younger than three are still working in that practice stage. If your child started using words or sentences later than most other kids their age, it usually takes them a little longer to catch up.

Does this mean she needs therapy to make her sound better?

Not necessarily. First, she needs time and practice and a large vocabulary. If your child doesn't have enough words in her vocabulary, it usually means she needs more time and practice with the sounds. Working first on increasing her vocabulary may help get her to practice enough so that the sounds come out clearer.

If your child has a large vocabulary that she's been using for a while and she's still not very clear, it's a good idea to ask about your concerns. Often her speech errors are what we call "developmental," which means that with time we expect kids to grow out of it.

Sometimes, errors are not developmental and need some help and direction from a speech language pathologist (SLP) to improve. If your child is frequently very frustrated while communicating, it's a good idea to ask an SLP. Talk to your pediatrician about your concerns and they can assist you in identifying speech language pathologists in your area.