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SPEECH DELAY

Is my child's speech development normal?

Normal speech development can look very different from child to child because there is such a wide range in what is considered normal. The *average* speech and language milestones for children include (keep in mind that there is a range of normal development):

- 12 months: using at least 1-2 specific words
- 18 months: using 10-20 words, understanding one-step commands
- 2 years: using >50 words, putting two words together, understanding two-step commands
- 3 years: using too many words to count, speaking in short sentences, speech understandable about 75% of the time
- 4 years: speaking in full, intelligible sentences

What can cause speech delay?

It is important to have your child with speech delay evaluated by a doctor, as there are a variety of causes that need to be considered which include:

- Isolated speech/language disorder (see below)
- Hearing loss
- Part of a more global developmental delay
- Autism spectrum disorder

What are the types of speech/language disorders?

- Expressive language disorder ("late talkers")
- Mixed receptive/expressive language disorder
- Phonological disorder (articulation issues)
- Stuttering disorder

What evaluation is needed for speech delay?

Your doctor will ask many questions about all domains of your child's development to ensure there are isolated speech/language concerns. Often, a hearing test by an audiologist will be recommended as it is important to rule out hearing loss as a cause of speech delay.

To determine the extent of the delays, your pediatrician may recommend an evaluation by a speech language pathologist (SLP)

What can be done?

SLPs specialize in speech development in children and their job is both to evaluate speech disorders and to provide therapy to encourage your child's development. In Calgary, preschool SLP assessments are by self-referral, meaning **YOU** call and arrange an appointment for your child:

Community Pediatric Rehabilitation (including SLP services) [403-910-2070](tel:403-910-2070)

If your child is in school, public SLP assessments and therapy are provided through the school. Alternatively, private assessments may be pursued. For a list of private providers see:

www.childrenslink.ca under "Speech Services"

STRATEGIES FOR SPEECH DELAY

If you are waiting to have your child assessed for speech delays, we have some suggestions and resources to encourage speech development. These strategies should be considered for all children, but may be particularly valuable for infants and toddlers with speech delay. If you are worried about your child's hearing, you may consider discussing hearing testing (audiology) with your doctor or public health nurse. Referral to Speech Languages services (SLP) is mentioned earlier in this handout.

Scientific studies have shown that babies who are exposed to more regular speech and stories develop language faster. Consider a library card for access to an almost endless choice of books.

1. We recommend **reading to your baby** daily, at any age. Early choices can include board books with large pictures. Making consistent eye contact, smiling and mimicking expressions, showing and describing pictures to infants and even talking about the story will enrich the experience for them.
2. **Singing to your baby** is another great way to teach language. Listening to songs and music is great, but hearing your voice singing is even more valuable.
3. **Speaking to your baby** can be as simple as describing what you are doing. Tell them about the day, talk about feeding, baths or bedtime and describe things you are seeing on a walk. Babies will often make eye contact, smile and coo or babble in response. Reward these first attempts at language with smiles and praise.

Use of ipads, (educational) television, computers, and cellphones is a much discussed topic in early childhood development. We **strongly discourage** the use of any of these in infants and toddlers (up to 2 years old) and recommend limiting use in older children. They have not been proven to promote speech and may actually cause delays in social and language development. We do not consider knowing how to work a cell phone or tablet to be a valuable skill for toddlers. (for more information see : <https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/screen-time-and-young-children>) Using screen based video apps to let relatives such as grandparents visit with baby is an exception to the above!

If your first language is not English, do not feel pressured to speak to your infant or toddler in English. They will have lots of opportunities to learn later in childhood. Children learn language best from parents if they consistently hear words, songs and stories in their parent's native language. Parents and caregivers may each speak a different (native) language but should try to be consistent with the child.

More information about general development can be found here:
https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/your_childs_development

More strategies for speech development can be found here:
https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/read_speak_sing_to_your_baby

<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/talk-box-a-parent-s-guide-to-creating-language-rich-environments-preschool>