

Late Talkers

What Does a “Late Talker” Look Like?

Children between the age of 18 - 30 months who have:

- Typical receptive language skills (understanding language)
- Typical thinking, play, fine and gross motor skills
- No developmental diagnosis such as autism, cerebral palsy or Down syndrome

The delay is strictly related to expressive vocabulary and other expressive language skills.

What Should I Expect?

At about 18 months of age a toddler's expressive language will include:

- 20 words with a variety of nouns ("mama," "dada"), verbs ("run," "jump"), social words ("hi," "bye"), prepositions ("on") and descriptive words ("hot")

At about 24 months a toddler will have an expressive vocabulary of about 150 - 300 words and will start combining two words together ("big doll," "mommy up").

Are there Risk Factors I Should Consider?

Late talkers can present with the following characteristics:

- Frequent ear infections
- Limited consonants compared to other toddlers the same age
- Failure to imitate sounds or words spoken by others
- Limited use of gestures to communicate non-verbally by 12 months (e.g., pointing or waving)
- Vocabulary has a higher number of nouns than verbs
- Use of fewer than 10 words on their own by 18 months
- Use of fewer than 20 words by age 2
- Minimal babbling by 12 months (e.g., mama, baba, dada)
- Reduction in use of sounds or words than when they were younger
- Lack of interest in social interaction including eye contact or attempting nonverbal communication
- Lack of symbolic play including rocking a baby or pretending toy airplanes can fly

Will My Child Catch Up on Their Own?

Some children will catch up, but others will not. As of now, we are not able to predict who will and who won't. Fortunately, 70 - 80% of late talkers will catch up on their own; this means that 20 - 30% will not. These children will get further behind without support, the sooner we can see them the greater the opportunity for communication success!



What Should I Do?

If your child is a late talker and presents with 2 or 3 of the above risk factors, it is best to consult with a registered speech-language pathologist. The speech-language pathologist can administer tests to identify the presence or absence of speech, language, social or any other communication difficulties. Early intervention using specific techniques and strategies work!

Be sure to have your child's hearing screened or assessed to rule out hearing difficulties.

See the associated handout: **Late Talkers: Strategies & Recommendations**

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