



Help Your Child's Speech Development



CHARLES B. WANG
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

Speech Helps Your Child Communicate and Succeed in School

Speech is the ability to use your mouth to create sounds and speak. This includes sounds like vowels and consonants in English and tones like those in Chinese. Speech allows children to talk to family and friends, and helps them express their ideas and needs. It also plays a big role in your child's school success. Your child needs to speak clearly to teachers and classmates to learn and do well in school.

Speech Delay Is a Common Child Development Problem

Some children have speech delays. This means that they develop the ability to speak more slowly than most children of the same age.

Common signs of speech delay

For infants:

- No response to sound
- No babbling

For children between 12- and 24-months-old:

- Trouble making sounds
- Use of gestures instead of sounds
- Trouble saying words or creating phrases
- Use of only certain sounds or words
- Speech that is hard to understand

For children over 2-years-old:

- Inability to create phrases on their own
- Use of only certain sounds or words
- Trouble expressing themselves verbally
- Raspy or nasal voice

If your child shows any of the common signs of speech delay, see your doctor. Without proper treatment, speech delay can affect your child's performance in school and his or her social life.





Get Professional Help

Bring your child to the doctor to check for anything that may add to your child's speech problem, such as poor hearing. If your child does not have a hearing problem, your doctor can refer your child to a speech therapist for an evaluation. The therapist can test for any speech problems by checking:

- What your child says and understands
- How your child uses his or her mouth, lips, and tongue to speak
- How your child communicates through gestures

The speech evaluation can be done in the language your child is most familiar with.

Therapy Can Treat Speech Delay

If your child has a speech delay, have your child start speech therapy as soon as possible. The earlier that you seek help, the better your child will learn and progress. The speech therapist can improve your child's speech by demonstrating how to make sounds with his or her mouth, lips, and tongue, and having your child copy them. This helps your child practice making sounds correctly. Therapy may also include:

- Exercises to strengthen the mouth's muscles
- Exercises to correct your child's pronunciation
- Games that help your child practice speaking

How often and how long your child meets with the therapist depends on your child's problem and progress. Therapists do not prescribe medicine for speech problems.

Stay Involved in Your Child's Therapy

Children have the best results from therapy when their parents are involved. Observe your child's speech therapy sessions, and ask the therapist how you can help your child. You may be able to help your child practice the speech exercises at home.



Encourage Your Child's Speech Development

In addition to help from your doctor and speech therapist, you can help improve your child's speech at home.

- Talk to your child as often as possible. Ask your child questions.
- Listen closely and look at your child when he or she speaks.
- Reply to your child's questions or add to what he or she tells you.
- Describe what your child is doing to teach your child new words.
- Read books to your child. Talk about the pictures, and ask your child to name the objects in the pictures.
- Sing with your child.
- Do not force your child to speak if he or she is not ready.

Teach Your Child Speech Skills with Your Native Language

If you do not feel comfortable speaking English, you can still teach your child valuable speech skills in your native language. Your child can learn your native language and English at the same time. It will not confuse your child or cause speech delay.

Many children learn their parents' native language at home and learn English in day care, preschool, or kindergarten. However, if your child has trouble learning English, get a speech evaluation to find out if your child has a speech problem or just needs more exposure to English. Tutoring or speech therapy can help your child learn better.

Be Patient with Your Child's Progress

Do not get frustrated or blame your child for learning slowly. This affects your child's confidence and can make your child scared to express his or her thoughts. Be patient with your child's pace, and praise your child for any improvement.





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