



Speech and Language Disorders Common in Children

Timely Intervention Is Key to Success, Stresses SW MI-Based Expert

May 2024 —With speech and language disorders ranking among the most common disabilities that affect children, families are encouraged to learn the signs of these disorders and to seek an evaluation if they have concerns. It’s a timely message that SW MI speech-language pathologist Patricia Masello, M.S., CCC-SLP is sharing for May, which is recognized as *National Speech-Language-Hearing Month*.

“A child’s ability to communicate effectively is critical to their learning, future reading and writing success, academic performance, social interactions, and even their behavior,” said Masello. “Speech and language disorders are generally treatable, and even reversible or preventable in some cases with early intervention. Unfortunately, many parents who have concerns are told to ‘wait and see’ if their child’s difficulties resolve on their own—often by well-meaning friends, family members, and sometimes even professionals.”

Masello continued: “This sadly can result in delayed treatment outside of the optimal time window for intervention, which is between birth and 3 years. During these years, 80% of a child’s brain development occurs. I want to encourage parents to seek help if they have any concern at all about their child’s development—at any age. There’s no downside to getting an evaluation, and it doesn’t mean your child will definitely need professional services. But it will give parents the information they need to best support their child.”

Speech and language disorders are evaluated and treated by speech-language pathologists. **Speech** is the ability to produce speech sounds using the mouth, lips, and tongue. A child may make mistakes with sounds in words, repeat sounds and words, or be difficult to understand. **Language** is the ability to use and put words together—and to understand others’ words.

Masello shares some of the following warning signs for parents to watch for in young children:

- Does not smile or interact with others (birth and older)
- Does not babble (4–6 months)
- Makes only a few sounds or gestures, like reaching (7–9 months)
- Does not understand what others say (10 months – 2 years)
- Says only a few words (19 months – 2 years)
- Does not put words together to make sentences (19 months – 3 years)



- Speaks using words that are not easily understood by others (3–4 years)
- Has trouble with early reading skills, like pretending to read or finding the front of a book (4–5 years)

Masello offers parents these tips to encourage a child’s communication development at home:

- Talk about what you’re doing, what your child is doing, and what your child sees. Use longer sentences as your child grows older.
- Communicate with your child in the languages that you are most comfortable using.
- Use a lot of different words with your child. Don’t worry about using big words. Children enjoy new and unusual words.
- Help your child listen. Give directions for your child to follow.
- Tell stories to your child a lot. Read to your child as much as you can.
- Ask questions and talk about what happened in the story. Read to your child in the languages they are learning.
- Don’t interrupt your child to correct their speech sounds. It’s okay if your child makes some mistakes with sounds. Say the sounds correctly when you talk.
- Set limits for screen time. Use that time for talking, reading, and playing together.

Families can familiarize themselves with [communication milestones](#), which are the skills that most children achieve within particular age ranges, from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). These milestones are for children between birth and 5 years. Children may not meet every milestone listed within their age range. However, if a child is missing several skills in an age range, then families may want to seek an evaluation.

Learn more about the signs of speech and language disorders from ASHA at <http://IdentifytheSigns.org> and www.asha.org/public.

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