

Speech and Language Problems

TIP

If you think that your child has a communication problem, don't delay seeking help. Talk to your child's pediatrician and request a referral for a speech-language pathologist.

Children develop speech and language skills at different speeds. Although the stages that children pass through are the same, the exact age when they achieve speech and language milestones can vary quite a bit. If you think your child is not communicating well for his or her age, it may be that your child is just moving at his or her own pace through the developmental stages. However, if you think that your child is significantly behind, then your child may have an underlying mental health issue.

The following is a list of typical signs and symptoms of a speech and language problem. Your child may have a speech and language problem if he or she has trouble:

- Talking clearly enough to be understood outside the family
- Understanding others
- Following directions
- Reading or writing
- Answering questions
- Expressing thoughts and ideas in a clear manner using appropriate vocabulary and grammar
- Using language for engaging in a variety of social interactions with family or friends or in school

Possible mental health diagnoses within this symptom cluster include:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (p52)
- Autism Spectrum Disorders (Pervasive Developmental Disorders) (p54)
- Learning Disorders (p75)
- Speech and Language Disorders (p90)



Helping your child develop speech and language skills

HERE ARE A FEW GENERAL TIPS YOU CAN USE AT HOME:

- Spend a lot of time communicating with your child, even during infancy. Talk, sing, and encourage imitation of sounds and gestures.
- Read to your child, starting as early as 6 months. You don't have to finish a whole book, but look for age-appropriate soft or board books or picture books that encourage your child to look while you name the pictures. As your child gets older, let him or her point to recognizable pictures and try to name them. Then move on to nursery rhymes, which have rhythmic appeal. Then move on to predictable books, in which your child can anticipate what happens.
- Use everyday situations to reinforce your child's speech and language skills. In other words, talk your way through the day. For example, name foods at the grocery store, explain what you're doing as you cook a meal or clean a room, point out objects around the house, and point out sounds you hear as you drive. Ask questions and acknowledge your child's responses, even when they're hard to understand.