

Assessing and Promoting Language Development

By Judith S. Bloch, ACSW



It's understandable that parents of a preschooler who isn't very talkative, and in fact, hardly says a word, may wonder if she's using language as expected. How can a parent know if her child's language is delayed or if she's just a late bloomer? There are certain markers for you to be aware of. While all ages and stages are critical, the first 18 months are considered the most important for learning language. The age at which children achieve language milestones varies and is influenced by many factors including temperament, birth order, bi-lingual exposure, and ear infections. However, there are also red-flag alerts. Below are key milestones typical of children whose language is developing normally.

■ **Infants up to one year:** Turn in the direction of a sound; cry to communicate needs and emotions; make eye contact; use a social smile and coo and vocalize.

■ **One to two:** Babble with gestures; use true words with gibberish; respond to adult gestures; imitate simple gestures on request; shake head; communicate to get needs met and say 8 to 10 words spontaneously.

■ **Two to three:** Understand at least 500 to 900 words; have a vocabulary of at least 50 to 250 words; combine 2 or 3 words and comment on ongoing activities.

If your child is experiencing delays or doesn't have these skills, you should have her evaluated to see if there's an observable language delay or disorder. For best results, interventions before age three are recommended. Worried parents may arrange for evaluations for children birth to age three at no cost through the Department of Health. Contact their Early Intervention office in Nassau (516-571-3749) or Suffolk (631-858-3100). Try the Early Childhood Direction Center for children ages three to five in Nassau (516-364-8580) or Suffolk (631-863-2600). The Variety Child Learning Center provides comprehensive early intervention evaluations at home and a full range of services, including speech/language, physical, occupational therapy; special education; family counseling and parent education. For information, call early intervention supervisor Judi Zipkin at 516-921-7171, ext. 2105.



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