

Doc Talk

By Dr. Veronica Naudin



Speech Development in Children - What is "Normal"?

Q: My two year old is not speaking. Should I be worried?

A: In my practice, I find that parents worry about many things but most especially about the possibility of speech delay. Expressive speech or the ability to talk and express one's desires and needs is important at age 2. Unfortunately, every individual develops the ability to speak at very individual times. While some 15-18 month old toddlers are speaking in full sentences, some 2 year olds have very few words or none and yet may eventually develop normal speech. While it is certainly possible that your two year old will eventually start speaking, it is appropriate to begin doing some assessments on your child to ensure that your child will complete normal development.

The most appropriate first step is to consult your child's pediatrician. One of the purposes of having regular pediatric care is for your pediatrician to watch over your child's growth and development. If you have known your pediatrician for many months, he/she may have a better understanding of your child's development and will be able to give you some guidance. Based on your child's history and exam, your pediatrician may order some additional testing and/or assessments.

One of the earliest tests that I order for my patients with expressive speech delay is a hearing test. If your child has had frequent ear infections, this may result in excessive fluid in the middle ear that causes hearing loss. A hearing test is an easy test for your child, as it does not hurt. If your child has a hearing loss, it will need to be addressed. In the North County, we have an excellent speech development resource called CCHAT. They are located in Encinitas and their primary objective is to help children with hearing loss.

After a hearing test, your physician may order a Speech Evaluation. Children's hospital has many outpatient offices where a qualified pediatric speech pathologist can do an initial assessment. The speech pathologists can help your physician determine the etiology of your child's expressive speech delay. They can determine if your child needs additional help in learning to express sounds and ultimately words.

If your child is actually closer to age 3, your pediatrician

may refer you to your local school rather than Children's Hospital for a speech evaluation. At age 3, the school becomes responsible for speech issues in children and you have the right to request a speech evaluation on your child. Many people are under the false impression that a parent can request speech benefits only after their child is enrolled. However, this is not true and you may request speech benefits beginning at age 3.

A new resource in San Diego for mild speech delays is the Children's C3 program. The First 5 commission of San Diego funds this program. The program provides complimentary screening of your child's speech and development. In addition to screening, the program provides several parenting and development classes for parents. You may contact the C3 program at 760- 754-6110. C3 has offices in Oceanside, Solana Beach, and San Diego.

If your pediatrician has concerns for your child's other areas of development, he may send your child for a full consultation with a pediatric developmental specialist or a pediatric neurologist. These specialists can help determine if a medical condition or diagnosis is at the root of your child's speaking problem.

Hopefully, this article has given you a basic guideline for approaching your child's speech question this year. A child's development can be a stressful on parents when the development seems slower than another child. We all want what is best for our children. So as a parent, you may need to take the first step in ensuring that your child will continue to develop to his/her potential. If you have additional questions or concerns, please call your pediatrician today.

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Dr. Jorge Castro, Dr., Veronica Naudin, Dr. Stanley Ambo, and Dr. Lyra Ng are dedicated to providing you with the quality health care that you desire for your children.

Please send questions and/or suggestions to:

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