



# COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Better Hearing & Speech Month

## Speech and Language Disorders Are Experienced by Many Children—But Are Treatable

*Parents encouraged to learn the signs of trouble for Better Hearing & Speech Month*

With speech and language disorders ranking among the most common disabilities in children, parents and caregivers are encouraged to learn the signs—and seek an evaluation—if they have concerns about their child’s ability to communicate. House Ear Institute speech-language pathologists offer timely guidance for families because May is recognized nationally as Better Hearing & Speech Month.

Development of strong communication skills is extremely important—as parents anxiously await their child’s first words, yet common misconceptions remain. One is that children generally ‘grow out’ of speech or language difficulties. Unfortunately, this mistaken impression too often delays treatment. Of course, some children are indeed ‘late bloomers,’ yet treatment is frequently necessary, too. Good communication skills are critical, helping with behavior, learning, reading, social skills, and friendships. It is much easier, more effective, and less costly to treat speech and language disorders early—and May is a great time to educate parents on this important point.”

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 say sounds the wrong way, repeat sounds and words, or be otherwise difficult to understand. *Language* is the ability to use and put words together—and to understand others’ words. A child may have trouble understanding questions, following directions, or naming objects. Early speech and language treatment sets a child up for future school and social success.

House Ear Institute shares some of the following warning signs for parents to watch for in young children:

- Does not babble (4–7 months)
- Makes only a few sounds or gestures, like pointing (7–12 months)
- Does not understand what others say (7 months–2 years)
- Says only a few words (12–18 months)
- Says *p*, *b*, *m*, *h*, and *w* incorrectly in words (1–2 years)
- Words are not easily understood (18 months–2 years)
- Does not put words together to make sentences (1.5–3 years)
- Says *k*, *g*, *f*, *t*, *d*, and *n* incorrectly in words (2–3 years)
- Produces speech that is unclear, even to familiar people (2–3 years)

- Repeating the first sounds of words, like “b-b-b-ball” for “ball” (any age)
- Stretching sounds out, like “fffffarm” for “farm” (any age)

For school-age children, warning signs may include the following:

- Has trouble following directions
- Has problems reading and writing
- Does not always understand what others say
- Is not understood by others
- Has trouble talking about thoughts or feelings

House Ear Institute offers parents these tips to encourage a child’s communication development:

For young children:

- Talk, read, and play with your child.
- Listen and respond to what your child says.
- Talk with your child in the language that you are most comfortable using.
- Teach your child to speak another language, if you speak one.
- Talk about what you do and what your child does during the day.
- Use a lot of different words with your child.
- Use longer sentences as your child gets older.
- Have your child play with other children.

For elementary-age children:

- Have your child retell stories and talk about their day.
- Talk with your child about what you do during the day. Give them directions to follow.
- Talk about how things are the same and how things are different.
- Give your child chances to write.
- Read every day. Find books or magazines that interest your child.

Although treatment ideally begins early—in the toddler years—it is never too late to get treatment. The large majority of parents report significant improvement after treatment. Los Angeles residents who want to schedule an assessment may contact House Clinic at (213)483-9930 or send an email to [lkayvan@houseclinic.com](mailto:lkayvan@houseclinic.com)