

LANGUAGE AND SPEECH DELAY

It is important to identify the distinction between language delay and language disorders. Language delay is when language development is in the right sequence but the rate of development is slowed down. Language and speech disorders are when the language development is abnormal. Children vary in terms of their language development but follow a similar timeline. We have comprised a chart (link) for the language development milestones at each stage. If you realize that your child is not on track, it may be a warning to potential language and speech delay.

Does your child show the following symptoms?

Age	Comprehension	Expression
1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unresponsive to speech or environmental sound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot vocalize in string of syllables
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No response when their names are called Unable to follow simple verbal instructions, e.g. "give to mummy" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot say single words
2.5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot understand simple questions, e.g. "do you want it?", "yes or no?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot combine words, e.g. "blow bubbles", "Daddy shoes"
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot understand questions like "where?", "who?", etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot use complete sentences in daily conversation, e.g. "I want biscuit"
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot understand complicated instructions Cannot comprehend simple stories or cartoons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot retell events in simple words Cannot give answers appropriately Make frequent mistakes in organizing sentences
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot understand more complicated instructions Cannot comprehend complicated stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot retell simple stories in an organised way Still make mistakes in choosing words or organizing sentences.

Source: Child Assessment Service, Department of Health, HKSAR

That said, speech and language delay might stem from a variety of reasons, it could be both internal or due to environmental issues, for example, articulation delay, oral motor difficulty, lack of language stimulation. Here, we will break down each reason and give some useful suggestions for parents/caregivers to employ.

Reasons behind language delay:

Lack of Language Stimulation:

This is a very common reason behind speech delay. This is solely due to the environment at which children are in. In this case, children simply do not have the motivation or the suitable situation for them to speak. Children may not be given the chance to communicate with language. They could be:

- Overprotected with no reason to speak
- Neglected, simply with nobody to talk to
- Lack of a role model to observe and imitate

Parents could give space for children to express their feelings and ideas. If they are yet to learn to speak, encourage them to use gestures to express their thoughts. Parents/caregivers tend to help children make decisions in order to be more efficient. However, children lose their opportunity to express and communicate with language, eventually, not trying. Also, provide more exposure to language, for example, verbalizing everything you do. This helps to increase the sensitivity to the language and also allows better understanding.

Hearing Ability:

This category can be divided into two parts:

1. Hearing Loss

This is when individuals have problems with their ear or the 'receptive' part of the auditory system, they either could hear partial sounds or none at all. This could be related to damage of problems with the outer ear, middle ear, or inner ear. Language delay occurs as sounds are not received accurately.

2. Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)

This, on the other hand, is a very different situation. Even though APD individuals may show symptoms similar to that of hearing loss, Individuals APD have normal hearing ability. It is the organization, processing and analyses of the audio input that is impaired, the pathway at which signals are sent to the brain. APD individuals may have difficulty hearing in a noisy environment, difficulty distinguishing similar sounds etc. It is important to note that APD is not the result of a high-order deficit, like autism or attention deficit.

It is important to identify the cause to the problem; therefore, children are advised to take a hearing test to pinpoint the exact reason.

Oral Motor Ability:

Speech production involves the use of a group of muscles: lips, tongue, jaw and cheeks. Children who have weaker muscular strength, mobility and control may result in language and speech delay. Feeding skills and oral motor exercises will benefit children with oral motor disabilities.

Other developmental disorders:

Speech delay may be stemmed from inborn developmental disorders, where its symptoms lead to speech delay. First of all, speech delay may be seen children with Autism. As autistic individuals have delay in cognition, language, social communication, sensation and behaviour, it leads to learning difficulties. Speech delay is one of the first signs of Autism. Language ability is best improved through therapy.

Secondly, language delay can also be seen in individuals with Down's syndrome. This is due to the delayed cognitive ability, leading to difficulties in understanding and expressing, articulating and voicing. Individuals with Down's syndrome will benefit from speech therapy to improve social communication skills.

Thirdly, language delay can also be seen in individuals with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Language delay mainly stems from inattentiveness, impulsivity and poor organization skills. Individuals can learn better from 'pulse' style diffused learning (implementing small breaks/moving time between activities) or learning according to their unique learning style (e.g. visual learner, kinesthetic, print-orientated learning etc.). It is often difficult for ADHD individuals to learn through the traditional schooling system, therefore finding the suitable learning style would definitely be beneficial.

It is important to identify the problem earlier and to implement different strategies to help. Therefore, if there are any concerns, parents should not hesitate to seek assistance. Contact Us [\(link\)](#).

References:

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Communication Disorder. In *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.).

doi:10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596.744053

Children's speech and language development: What's normal? (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2016, from <http://babyfit.sparkpeople.com/articles.asp?id=999>

Child Assessment Service, Department of Health, HKSAR
Guide to Speech Delays. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2016, from <http://www.parenting.com/article/speech-delays>