

The Late Talker

Q: My child is 18 months old and is only using a few words. Everyone is telling me that he will probably 'grow out of it.' But, what if he doesn't? How can I know?

You won't know for sure. In the 12 months between a child's first and second birthday, the average toddler will go from a vocabulary of three words to over 200 words, words which are combined into three word phrases or telegraphic sentences. However 12-14% of children will be considered "late talkers."

A child is considered a late talker if he or she:

- Has fewer than 10 words and is between 18 and 20 months or age; **OR**
- Has fewer than 25 words and is between 21 and 24 months of age; **OR**
- has fewer than 50 words or no two-word phrases and is between 24 and 30 months of age; **AND** has relatively good comprehension, play, social, motor and cognitive skills

Parents of 'late talkers' are given conflicting advice. Conventional wisdom is that late talkers will "catch up" and are indistinguishable from early talkers later in life. However, the latest research has clearly shown that late talking is associated with a very high incidence of language disorders, learning disabilities, poor academic outcomes, declining IQ as the child ages, and social or behavioral problems. Lack of expressive language is often the first sign that something is wrong. Additional Red Flags may include:

- Limited babbling in the first year of life
- Any degree of difficulty of understanding
- Limited use of gestures at 10-24 months or nonverbal at 24 months of age
- Babbling that is predominately vowels, or contains a limited number of consonants
- Failure to imitate or echo single-word labels in the second year of life
- Parroting utterances that are much longer than the child can produce spontaneously
- Research indicates that the later the child talks, the more significant the delay
- Lack of symbolic or "pretend" play
- Parental concern

So what's a parent to do?

Early intervention (therapy) for late talkers has proven extremely successful in limiting or completely reversing the negative outcomes as compared to those who do not receive any intervention. Parents can monitor their child's speech and language development through developmental checklists such as: www.atsaz.net and click on parent information, or go to <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/>. If there are concerns parents should discuss them with their pediatrician and seek a speech-language pathologist certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association for a professional screening and/or evaluation. Advanced Therapy Solutions offers free screenings for children birth to five years. Call for appointment to 480-820-6366.