

A B C D E F G H Children's Health

Helping Your Child With Speech And Language Development

(NAPSA)—Speech and language skills develop at varying rates for children. Still, there are certain milestones most children reach at specific ages. Common, everyday interaction between children and those around them is the best way to boost and enhance speech and language skills. From birth, hearing is critical for children to learn and react to the world around them. An unidentified hearing loss can cause a delay in speech and language development. Consequently, it is better to identify and treat hearing loss as soon as possible.

Parents and other caregivers can do many things to encourage speech and language development and provide learning opportunities. Some examples:

- Listen and respond to your child. Acknowledge, encourage, and praise attempts to communicate.
- Talk to your child about what you are doing, what you see, what your child is doing, and what your child sees. Use language that is appropriate for your child's speech and language abilities.
- Accept mistakes as your child's speech develops. Simply repeat or expand what was said, using the correct words or sounds.
- If you don't understand what your child is saying, ask your child to repeat or help your child to rephrase.

Seek help if you suspect your child is having a speech, language, or hearing problem. An evaluation can determine whether



It's never too early or too late to read to your child. Reading introduces new words and ideas, even if you simply describe pictures without following the written words.

or not a child's skills are developing normally. Certified speech-language pathologists and audiologists are educated and trained at the master's or doctoral level to evaluate communication skills and treat disorders.

The steps you take can be very important. During the first five years of life, the building blocks for lifelong communication are formed. Believing your child will "grow out of a problem" can hinder his or her ability to read, write, learn, and engage in social relationships.

For more information on this or other subjects, such as hearing loss, stuttering, aphasia, articulation, or voice problems, and prevention of noise-induced hearing loss, contact the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association at 1-800-638-8255 or www.asha.org.