

Parents' Guide to Speech and Language Therapy

Children acquire language rapidly in their first few years of life but some children can experience problems with this area of their development. Often, this is identified by your health visitor at the regular progress checks but it could be that you suspect that things are not quite right, or maybe your child has recently started school or nursery and the teacher has told you that there may be an issue.

How Do I Know Whether My Child Has a Problem?

For an idea of where your child should be for their age, have a look at the [Twinkl Parents' Guide to Speech and Language Development](#).

There are four main areas where children can experience difficulties:

- **Speech sounds:** This is extremely common in many school-age children, and refers to the mispronunciation of sounds in speech. For example, a child may still pronounce 'th' as 'f' ('fank you').
- Difficulties with understanding language, also known as **receptive skills:** A child with receptive difficulties may be unable to follow instructions.
- Difficulties with producing language, also known as **expressive skills:** Children with expressive difficulties may struggle to put together a sentence correctly or organise their thoughts into speech.
- Problems using speech appropriately in context, also known as **social skills** or **pragmatic skills:** Examples of this include non-verbal skills, such as making eye contact and conversational skills, such as knowing how to start and end a conversation or not interrupting.

Some children experience only one of these difficulties but others may appear to have difficulties in two or more areas.

What Should I Do If I Suspect a Problem?

If you have suspicions that there is a problem, speak to your health visitor, GP, child's teacher or key person and they will make a referral to the Speech and Language Therapists for you.

My Child's Teacher Tells Me They Have a Speech and Language Problem. What Happens Now?

If the problem is identified in school or nursery, the teacher will ask for your consent to make a referral. They will complete a form giving information to the Speech and Language Therapists about the issues they have identified. The therapists will then contact you directly to make an appointment for you to bring your child for an assessment. This is usually at your GP practice or local children's centre. It is really important that you attend, as you will not be chased for the appointment and your child will simply be signed off completely, meaning that you will have to start the process again.

If the speech therapist agrees that your child needs support, they will develop some exercises for them to do. These are fun games and activities that children enjoy. The therapist will also send a copy to your child's school so that staff there can work with them. Your child will be reviewed regularly, either at the GP practice or within school – again, make sure you keep any appointments you are given.

If your child is identified as having speech and language difficulties, the school may decide to add them to their SEN (special educational needs) register. Do not feel too concerned by this – it has lots of benefits for

your child. For example, the school will track their progress even more closely than they do the other pupils. In addition, the school will receive extra money, which they can spend on teaching support or materials that will help your child to make progress with their speech.

What Can I Do at Home to Help My Child?

As a parent, there are lots of things that you can do to support your child through this process. As mentioned above, always keep the appointments you are given for speech therapy. Keep in close contact with your child's teachers and ask how they are getting on at school. If your child has been given games, activities or exercises to do then, make sure you are practising these at home. Little and often is best – five minutes a day is much better than 30 minutes once a week. See if school can provide or suggest any materials that you could use. Ensure you talk lots as a family. Model good language and speech sounds yourself. If your child makes a mistake, don't correct them but instead, repeat it back to them correctly. For example,

Child – “Me and Granny goed to the park.”

Parent – ‘You and Granny went to the park. How exciting!’