

Not Too Little, Not Too Late

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- Did your child start using words at around one year old?
- Did she use less than 50 words and/or not combine words by her third birthday?
- Does he have normal hearing, non-verbal cognitive and physical activity, and personality development?
- Is there a family history of language delay?
- Is your child male?

Children typically begin to use words around their first birthday. Although timing of early language development varies significantly between children, they are considered late talkers if under 3 years and at the lower end of the language production continuum with no known neurological, sensory or cognitive disorder.

Consequences of being a late talker can include:

- Delayed language and academic development
- Poorer social skills, including delayed social conversation skills
- Weaker ability to relate to others and feel connected to them
- Less interest in play; poorer imitation/pretend play skills
- Greater difficulty adjusting socially and emotionally to situations

There is evidence to say that while some catch up to their peers in language development, late talkers don't usually find it as easy to build social interaction skills as their classmates and that negative effects on social skills continue even after late talkers' language catches up.

A recent study looked at social interaction in late talking children during the process of language development. Social interaction behaviour is the child's capacity to participate in turn-taking with others, and involves eye contact and signals of emotions and mood used to establish and sustain social exchanges.

While the brain is clearly crucial in language acquisition, social interaction is the key to developing communication. It's the context in which children build their language. Social interaction is like a playground: How will she coordinate hands and feet to climb a ladder if she hasn't seen any? How will he understand the joys of a sloping metal plank until he is placed on a slide?

The 2015 study showed that:

- Late talkers aren't as good at kicking off social interaction, but when an adult initiates an exchange and the child gets involved, late talkers respond like other typically developing children.
- This study and previous research suggests that late talkers can be divided into:
 - a) those who show low interest in initiating communication and sharing joint attention with someone
 - b) children who are keen to communicate but have impaired language development
- The more difficulty a child has understanding (poor receptive language skills), the more they try to initiate social interaction. It appears that they try to get the other person's attention and engage them then need the partner to provide "scaffolding" during interaction.

Early language intervention in very young toddlers is strongly recommended. Therapy should focus on the child within his or her social environment. Specifically, the aim is for the child to initiate social interaction with another person (or animal!) and for parents to use support strategies when interacting with their child to stimulate language comprehension *and* production.

An interesting related article:

A Closer Look at the Late Talker Study: Why Parents Should Beware of a 'Wait and See' Approach

<http://www.hanen.org/helpful-info/articles/a-closer-look-at-the-late-talker-study-why-parent.aspx>

References:

'Relationship between social interaction bids and language in late talking children' by Jasmina R. Vuksanovic (2015) in International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 2015; 17(6): 527-536.

'Researchers Determine the Three Ways to Well-Being' by David Sze (2015) in The Huffington Post blog.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-sze/researchers-determine-the-three-ways-to-well-being_b_7512510.html



Image from: <http://www.mindfueldaily.com/livewell/time-out-for-mindfulness-transforming-traditional-discipline>

[Call Box Hill Speech Pathology Clinic on 9899 5494](http://www.mindfueldaily.com/livewell/time-out-for-mindfulness-transforming-traditional-discipline) if you are concerned that your child may be a late talker.

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