

## Language: The Key to Unlocking Life's Doors – Part Two

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The first five years of life are critical in language development. It used to be thought that language skills grew in a fairly predictable, steady manner. Studies now show that language development in children under five can speed up, stay the same or even go backwards within the space of a year. As such, although children who are 'late talkers' are often seen as being at greater risk of language impairment, many late-talking two year olds catch up by age four. In contrast, some children who have typically developing language at two years have a language impairment by age four.

These ups and downs in language development make it very tricky to identify who will go on to have a language impairment. For some children, there is no one point in time between birth and age seven when a single language assessment can show that a child is likely to have a lasting impairment. *On its own*, late talking cannot accurately indicate that a child will develop a persistent language impairment or serve as a reason for intervention. However, late talking could indicate broader developmental issues and so should be considered alongside other areas including receptive language, social and cognitive skills. When other areas are not impaired, language outcomes are often positive.

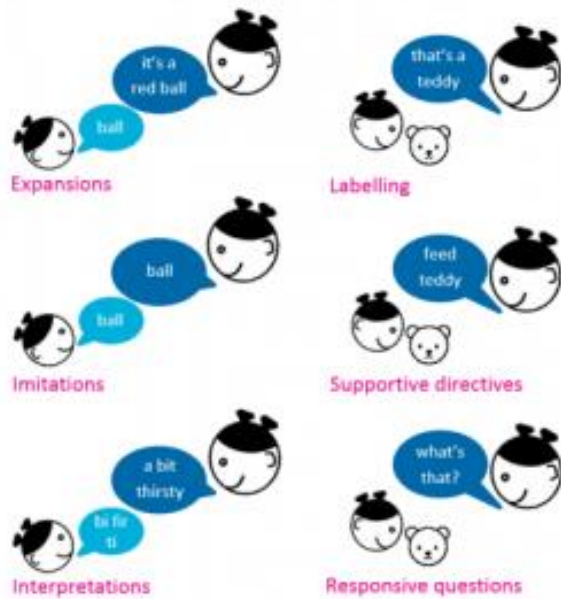
Responsive language behaviours in parents, including 'imitation' (where you repeat what your child has said), 'expansion' (where you repeat and add to what your child has said) and/or 'responsive questioning' have been shown to benefit children's language skill development. Have a look at the image below this article for more examples.

Several recommendations were made by the Centre of Research Excellence in Child Language in its Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Inquiry into the prevalence of different types of speech, language and communication disorders and speech pathology services in Australia. One was that language impairment should become a National Health Priority. Without greater recognition, understanding and funding, more effective and efficient diagnostic tools and intervention programs cannot be developed.

Another recommendation was for a Language Risk Prediction Chart, similar to the Cardiovascular Risk Prediction charts used by general practitioners, to be developed from data gathered during rigorous studies conducted by the Centre. This would permit parents and professionals to target those children with the greatest need for preventive or treatment interventions.

Given the wide range of long-term impacts of language impairment, further research is vital to identify reliable methods of early detection of children who will develop language impairment. The Centre of Research Excellence in Child Language state that "early detection and intervention programs (for speech and language disorders) have economic and social benefits at the individual, familial, community and national level". The Peninsula Model for Primary Health Planning – Children's Health Alliance supports this by recognising that "interventions at a later stage are more costly and less effective." If you are concerned about your child's language, seek assessment early with one of our friendly and experienced speech pathologists.

### Types of responsive behaviours studied



"Ball" graphic courtesy of Prisca Dumas, "Teddy" graphic courtesy of Kim Eriksson, The Noun Project

### References:

<https://www.mcri.edu.au/research/centres/centre-research-excellence-child-language>

[https://www.mcri.edu.au/sites/default/files/media/documents/crec\\_rs4\\_late-talkers-3\\_design\\_v0.1.pdf](https://www.mcri.edu.au/sites/default/files/media/documents/crec_rs4_late-talkers-3_design_v0.1.pdf)

[https://www.mcri.edu.au/sites/default/files/media/documents/crec1\\_rs3\\_late-talking-2\\_design\\_v0.1\\_0.pdf](https://www.mcri.edu.au/sites/default/files/media/documents/crec1_rs3_late-talking-2_design_v0.1_0.pdf)

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[Vince Borg](#), [Sarah Young](#), [Vicky Andrews](#) and [Emma Lorenzin](#) all have a special interest in child speech development and language difficulty. Book an appointment with them at Box Hill Speech Pathology Clinic on (03) 9899 5494 or direct your child speech questions to [enquiries@speech-therapy.com.au](mailto:enquiries@speech-therapy.com.au).

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