

What are Speech and Language Disorders?

All children develop at their own pace, including when they learn how to talk. But there are common milestones most children reach within a certain age range. For example, most babies say their first word around their first birthday. When a child has difficulty communicating, they might have a speech or language disorder.

Speech disorders involve trouble making sounds or speaking clearly. Difficulty understanding words, putting words together, or expressing ideas are considered language disorders. Children can have one or both.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How common are speech and language disorders?

Speech and language delays are common. About one in five children has some delay.

How can I find out if my child has a speech or language disorder?

Start by talking with a medical provider. They may do a hearing test or suggest your child sees an audiologist (hearing specialist), since hearing issues can impact speech and language development. If your child needs more testing or support, options include:

- Children under age three: Early Intervention (EI) programs offer evaluation and services for children experiencing developmental delays.
- Preschool and school-aged children: Your school district's Committee on Special Education can provide evaluation services to support learning.
- All ages: You can also look into private services, which are often covered by health insurance.

What services are available for children with speech or language disorders?

A speech-language pathologist (SLP) can help your child through play, exercise, or by teaching other ways to communicate.

What other conditions sometimes occur with speech and language disorders?

Sometimes, children with speech or language disorders can have other conditions such as hearing loss, other developmental delays, or autism spectrum disorder. It is important to talk with a medical provider or specialist about *any* concerns, even if they might not seem related.

Talking with a Medical Provider

When you talk to medical providers, you might want to:

- Ask if you should seek a formal evaluation now, or wait.
- Discuss other potential concerns and whether the delay might be related to other conditions.
- Share short videos of your child at home. Videos can show your child's speech, how they interact or play with others, and anything you're noticing that a medical provider might not see during an appointment.
- Talk about what treatments are recommended.

What You Can Do at Home

Children learn by watching and observing. This includes communication – they develop skills by listening to conversations around them. Parents and caregivers play an important role in helping children build language skills. You can help by:

- Pointing out and naming people, places, and things.
- Talking through your daily routines, engaging with your child along the way.
- Reading to your child every day! For younger children, simply looking at books and describing pictures can be more interesting and beneficial than reading the text.
- Singing songs and rhymes together.
- Encouraging your child to repeat words, phrases, and sentences while you play.

Learning about speech and language disorders and getting help is a journey. You're not alone.

Resources and Support in New York State

Search NYS



<https://bit.ly/searchnys>

NYS Department of Health County Programs – CYSHCN



<https://on.ny.gov/43ho1ZK>

ACT for Youth: Speech



<https://bit.ly/act-speech>

About this Series

This series of handouts on health conditions was written by clinicians in Weill Cornell Medicine's Pediatric Mental Health Integration Program, partners in the ACT for Youth CYSHCN Program Center of Excellence at Cornell University.

