



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

#### **Resource 002 | Developmental delays**

## **Speech and language delay**

### **What it means**

Speech and language delay describes slower development of spoken sounds, words, understanding, or other communication skills. Speech is the production of sounds; language is understanding and sharing meaning. A child may have difficulty with one or both. Communication also includes gestures, signs, pictures, and devices. [1]

### **Causes and risk factors**

Some children are late talkers; others have hearing loss, developmental language disorder, autism, motor speech difficulties, or broader developmental needs. A history of prematurity or family language difficulties may be relevant. Using more than one language does not itself cause a language disorder. Assessment must consider the child's opportunities and skills across languages. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



## Signs and everyday impact

Concerns include limited gestures, few attempts to communicate, difficulty understanding familiar directions, a small or slowly growing vocabulary, or speech that is unusually hard to understand for the child's age. Frustration may reflect difficulty getting a message across rather than unwillingness to cooperate. [1,2]

## Assessment and diagnosis

A speech-language pathologist reviews understanding, expression, play, gesture, speech sounds, and oral movements as needed. Hearing should be checked even when a child reacts to some sounds. A developmental review helps identify associated needs. Assessment across the child's languages and settings helps distinguish a language difference from a disorder. [1,2]

## Treatment and therapy

Care may involve monitoring with clear review dates, caregiver coaching, or direct speech-language therapy. Treatment depends on whether the main difficulty is language, sounds, or movement planning. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), such as pictures or signs, can support participation while spoken skills develop. Therapy should not be delayed solely because a final diagnosis is pending. [1,2,3]

## Support at home

Follow the child's interest. Name what they notice, respond to gestures, offer choices, and expand a message by one small step. Read or sing together without turning it into a test. Use the languages that support comfortable, meaningful family connection.

## When to seek help

Loss of words, gestures, or understanding needs prompt assessment. Coughing with drinks, repeated choking, or new weakness requires medical attention as well as communication support.

## Questions for your care team

- Is the main concern understanding, expression, speech sounds, or several areas?
- Has hearing been assessed and are all home languages considered?
- What communication supports can we start using now?



## Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

### Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss speech and language delay. Speech and language delay describes slower development of spoken sounds, words, understanding, or other communication skills. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

**Opening:** Define the topic and its developmental context.

**Understanding:** Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

**Assessment:** Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

**Support:** Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

**Closing:** Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: AAC is not a sign of giving up on speech; it gives the child another way to communicate.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

### Terms in plain language

- Receptive language: understanding messages.
- Expressive language: sharing messages.
- AAC: communication supports beyond speech.

### Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

**[1] Late Language Emergence**

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/late-language-emergence>

**[2] Spoken Language Disorders**

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/spoken-language-disorders/>

**[3] Speech and Language Developmental Milestones**

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/speech-and-language>