



## Pediatric Speech & Language Therapy

### When to refer to a speech & language pathologist

Pediatric speech & language therapy aims to prevent, assess, diagnose, and treat speech, language, social communication, cognitive communication, literacy, and swallowing disorders in children.

Pediatric speech & language therapy addresses:

- **Expressive Language Skills:** sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings via spoken or written language. Expressive language disorders may involve a child's ability to accurately use the form (grammar), content (semantics), or use (pragmatics) of language in a functional way. Children with expressive language difficulties may not produce words by 15 months, or may not string words together by 2 years.
- **Receptive Language Skills:** understanding others. Receptive language disorders may involve a child's ability to understand the form, content, or use of language in a functional way. Children with receptive language disorders may not identify common objects when asked, or may not follow simple routine directions when asked.
- **Articulation Skills:** accurately producing the various sounds that make up a language. If a child is not understood by at least 50% of people by age 2, and 75% of people by age 3, they may have articulation difficulties.
- **Fluency Skills:** producing speech in a smooth and easy flowing manner. Children with fluency difficulties (i.e., stuttering or cluttering) will produce speech in a choppy manner because their speech gets stuck, suddenly rushes out to quickly, sounds like all the words are mashed together, they repeat or hold out a sound, or they produce a very high number of filler words in a row (e.g. um).
- **Voice Skills:** producing normal pitch, loudness, and vocal quality. Children with voice disorders may have chronic gravelly, scratchy, hoarse, or breathy sounding voices.
- **Social-Communication Skills:** successfully using and identifying verbal and non-verbal communication. Children with social-communication difficulties may have difficulties greeting, commenting, asking questions, talking in ways that suit the setting, and following the rules of conversation (i.e. the back and forth).
- **Cognitive-Communication Skills:** organizing thoughts, paying attention, remembering, planning, and/or problem-solving. Children with cognitive-communication difficulties may have a hard time organizing their thoughts well enough to logically present their ideas via spoken or written language.
- **Literacy Skills:** developing a child's decoding, reading comprehension, and reading fluency skills.
- **Feeding and Swallowing Skills:** preparing food or liquid in the oral cavity, moving or propelling food or liquid through the oral cavity, and initiating a swallow. Children with feeding or swallowing difficulties may present with atypical eating and drinking behaviors, such as not accepting age-appropriate foods, or accepting only a restricted variety or quantity of food or liquids.