

How do I know if my child under the age of 3 needs a speech assessment?

The notion that all late talkers are “little Einsteins” is a myth. Not all late talkers benefit from the wait and see approach. Here are some guidelines to help determine if your child needs a speech and language evaluation by a licensed speech therapist:

At 9 months evaluate if he:

- ~does not appear to enjoy the social rewards of interaction
- ~does not seem aware of sounds around him
- ~has very little babbling

At 9 months he should: imitate vocalizing, enjoy social games such as peek-a-boo, recognize familiar people, look toward the source of a sound, play with a variety of vocalizations

At 12 months evaluate if he:

- ~ looks at a desired item, but gives no indication (point, reach...) that he wants it.
- ~does not vocalize with repeating syllables such as bababa, mamama...

At 12 months he should: wave bye, imitate new sounds/actions, say mama and/or dada to mean mom and dad, communicate desires clearly by showing objects, tugging on adults, pointing to what he wants

At 18 months evaluate if he:

- ~does not use communicative gestures such as waving, pointing, shake head for ‘no’
- ~does not persist with communication attempts
- ~understands fewer than 50 words
- ~uses fewer than 10 words

At 18 months he should: say or approximate several words, start to put two words together, use ritual words such as hi, bye, no, please, follow simple directions such as “Give it to daddy.”

At 24 months evaluate if he:

- ~speaks fewer than 50 words
- ~does not use 2 word combinations
- ~uses speech, but it is mostly unintelligible
- ~uses language to label objects but not to comment or request
- ~has any regression in language skills

At 24 months he should: use mostly words to communicate, point to several body parts named, name pictures in a book

At 36 months evaluate if he:

- ~uses mostly single syllable words with no final consonants
- ~asks no questions
- ~tantrums when not understood
- ~echoes the speech of others without communicative intent
- ~has difficulty comprehending language unless it is simplified and includes gestures

At 36 months he should: understand simple 2 step directions (Go to your room and get your shoes.), carry on short conversations, talk to himself when playing, start using more mature language that includes plural –s and –ing markers.

Not all children who are evaluated will need intervention, but it is better to err on the side of caution when it comes to your child’s development!