



If your child displays any of the warning signs described, you should consult a speech and language pathologist to discuss your concerns.

AGE RANGE DESCRIPTION OF WARNING SIGNS

Birth to 12 months

- Avoids eye contact
- Rarely babbles
- Doesn't respond to whispered speech consistently
- Doesn't imitate gestures (for instance, bye-bye)
- Cries often without changing pitch/volume
- Shows little emotion

12 - 18 months

- Avoids eye contact
- Doesn't say "Ibu, Ayah, Mummy, Daddy"
- Unable to point out common body parts on request
- Unable to follow simple one-step directions (for example, get your shoes)

18 - 24 months

- Avoids eye contact
- Has difficulty pointing to pictures named
- Rarely attempts imitating or producing words
- Tunes out others frequently
- Is disinterested in talking

24 - 36 months old

- Avoids eye contact
- Has difficulty signing actions/songs
- Has difficulty naming common household objects
- Has difficulty attending to a book/movie for more than a few minutes
- Is very difficult to understand when talking

3 - 5 years old

- Speaks differently from other children of the same age — difficult to understand
- Has difficulty maintaining eye contact when listening/speaking
- Is disinterested/detached from other children of the same age when playing
- Making noises/gestures to express himself instead of

using words/sentences

- Has difficulty comprehending/following conversations
- Watches what others are doing and requires gestures before being able to follow instructions.
- Speaks in short phrases instead of complete sentences most of the time
- Leaves out words such as 'is' or 'the' [Adik not go in car]
- Leaves off endings

5 - 12 years old

- Speaks differently from other children of the same age
- Experiences difficulty reading, writing or spelling
- Has difficulty passing test even after studying
- Forgets the meaning of new words
- Struggles to put words together
- Has difficulty comprehending written or oral information easily
- Mispronounces multi-syllabic words/new words unless repeated or practiced many times
- Sounds babyish or awkward when speaking
- Is easily distracted
- Needs verbal directions to be repeated
- Uses vague language to retell a story or event, leaving the listener confused
- Jumps from topic to topic and makes unrelated comments during a conversation
- Has difficulty "getting started" or answering at all when asked an open-ended question, such as "What did you do in school?"
- Leaves out or distorts sounds
- Displays behavioural or social problems
- Sounds hoarse or too deep when speaking
- Stutters

When something is not quite right

The age at which speech therapy is required depends on the child and the nature of the problem

CHILDREN usually learn to talk by listening and repeating what they hear around them. Learning speech and language, however, does not always come easily to every child.

Sometimes a child needs a different approach to language learning, or a speech or language disorder may be causing a delay in their speech and language development.

Unfortunately, there is no set age at which parents should seek help for a speech, language or listening problem because each child's developmental path is unique.

Also, some problems are more pronounced than others and only become noticeable when a child is a little older.

The age at which a child needs therapy depends on the child and the nature of the problem.

Sometimes a child falls within a grey area — deficits may appear in a few speech or language areas but the child may still be within normal limits overall.

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This child may, in time, catch up and pass his peers or may fall further behind.

Don't make the mistake of confusing intelligence with speech, language or listening skills.

Although children with limited intellectual abilities do have limited communication skills, children with delayed communication skills do not necessarily have below-average intelligence.

Most parents I have worked with have been quite perceptive about their children.

However, more often than not, they tend not to trust their observations although they are usually right on target! So always trust your gut feeling if you think something is not "quite right".

The accompanying table may signal difficulties your child may be having and whether you should pursue help for your child.

If your child displays any of the warning signs described, you should consult a speech and language pathologist to discuss your concerns.

They can determine whether your child's communication represents a typical developmental pattern or if your child displays warning signs that you should investigate further.

Check that the Speech and Language Pathologist consulted is registered with the Malaysian Association of Speech — language and Hearing (MASH) to confirm that they have received the required hours of clinical and practical training.

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