

FACT SHEET

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Does Your Preschooler Have a Developmental Delay?

It's natural to want the very best for your child, and to worry when you begin to suspect there might be a problem. Parents and caregivers are often the first to notice delays, and these concerns should be discussed with the family doctor or pediatrician. A diagnosis for developmental delay can be made by a physician after careful and thorough evaluations.


Developmental milestones exist for many areas, for example motor, language, social and thinking skills. It is important to remember that there are wide ranges within each set of milestones. Developmental delays are not small differences in reaching milestones, they are more ongoing, and reflect major delays in development.

Language and speech problems are among the most common types of developmental delay. Speech has to do with how your child produces sounds and words and her voice, and language has to do with how well your child understands others and how well your child can share thoughts, ideas, and feelings. It's important to talk with your doctor about speech and language development at every routine well-child visit.

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, a two-to-three-year-old child should be able to understand the differences in meaning (big-little, up-down) and can follow to requests ("Get the book and put it on the table.") Most two-to-three-year-old children have a word for almost everything, can use two or three words to talk about and ask for things, and their speech is understood by those who know the child. By the age of three to four, a child can answer simple, "Who?", "What?", "Where?" questions, are understood by people outside of the family, and can talk in sentences that have four or more words.

If you have concerns or questions about your child's speech and language development, do not hesitate to contact your pediatrician or family doctor. Your doctor may encourage you to seek help from a certified speech-language pathologist, or point you in the direction of some early intervention services. The earlier you seek help, the earlier your preschooler can receive any extra help he or she may need.

Reading Rockets and LD OnLine "How Does Your Child Hear and Talk?" (www.ReadingRockets.org/article/5129)

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