

Does My Kindergarten Child Have a Language Delay or Disorder?

There is a significant range of ages at which children develop speech and language skills. As a parent, you may have noticed differences in your child's ability to speak clearly or use language compared to other children of his same age. How do you know if your child is just a bit slower than others are (and will "catch-up" on his own), or needs an assessment by a Speech-Language Pathologist? You may find the following guidelines helpful:

- Talk to your child's teacher. Teachers often have years of experience working with students of a specific age. They are usually able to tell if a student is far outside the range of what is expected for his or her age.
- Does your child have a lot of difficulty following directions, particularly if there is more than one step? Most children of kindergarten age are able to follow 2 and 3 step directions within known routines (e.g. Get your book and crayons and put them in your bag to take to Grandma's). If they don't remember or don't understand they will often ask questions (e.g. What did you say?).
- Is your child able to listen to a familiar storybook and answer questions by pointing or using his words? Most children of kindergarten age can answer who, what and where questions easily about stories or movies, even if they don't always use full sentences.
- Does your child *ask* questions? Children of kindergarten age ask a variety of questions including requests for items (e.g. Can I have that?), and requests for information (Who is that? When are we going? Where is Dad?). They also use questions to help them learn new vocabulary and understand the world (What's that called? Why?).
- Does your child often seem frustrated because he can't make you understand what he is trying to say? This can be a sign of a *language* disorder if he is able to pronounce the *words* fairly clearly (that is he can say most of the speech sounds correctly).
- Does your child make mistakes on the use of pronouns: I, you, he, she, him, her, his, hers, ours, theirs, we, or us? In kindergarten, most children use all of these pronouns correctly most of the time. They sometimes have trouble with later developing pronouns such as himself and herself. Kindergarten students who are not using the earlier developing pronouns (e.g. He says "Me get it." instead of "I will get it.") may need extra help.

- Does your child usually use very short sentences or only single words? In kindergarten, most children can use 5 or 6 word sentences.
- Does your child usually leave out many of the “small” words (is, are will, can to) in his sentences? E.g. He says “Daddy go now” instead of “Daddy is going to work.”
- Is it hard for you to tell if your child is talking about something that already happened or will happen later? He may be having difficulty understanding how to change verb tense (e.g. She will bake cookies. vs She baked cookies.) In kindergarten, many children continue to use irregular past tense incorrectly (e.g., they may say “rided” or “drinked” for rode and drank. They usually use regular past tense (e.g. colored) and use “will” or “going to” to show future tense.
- Does your child have difficulty remembering the names of things? He may use lots of actions to help get his ideas across or he may use a word that is similar but is his own version (e.g. “coppachoppa” for grasshopper). This is a red flag when it *often* impairs his ability to make himself understood.
- Does your child have difficulty talking about things he has done in an *order* that makes sense? Kindergarten children can usually talk about experiences in a way that is easy for their listener to understand. (E.g., I went to Doug’s birthday party. I gave him a present. We played a game. The cake was a clown.) They can easily answer the questions the adults ask. (E.g. What did you give him for a present?)

Students with language differences or with language disorders may benefit from specific support. Language learning disorders can make it harder for a child to learn in the classroom. If your child shows some of the red flags noted above, you can ask for a speech-language screening from the Speech-Language Pathologist at your child’s school.

References

Paul, Rhea Language Disorders from Infancy through Adolescence – 3rd Edition, Moseby Elsevier Pub., 2007



