



SPEECH AND LANGUAGE RESOURCE GUIDE

For Children with Down Syndrome
Preschool Through Kindergarten

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Why can't my child communicate?

By preschool age, some children with Down syndrome are speaking, others are not yet speaking but are using sign language or a picture communication system. Some children are using single words, and many are using 2 and 3 word combinations. Communication skills at this age are related to muscle strength and coordination in the oral facial area, oral motor planning skills, hearing, and cognitive abilities. If your child is not yet speaking, that does not mean he will not speak. Children with Down syndrome have a wide variety of speech challenges. When parents are considering inclusion and special education setting choices for preschool and kindergarten, you need to consider how your child understands speech and can follow directions and what system your child uses to communicate. But, children with Down syndrome at all communication levels can benefit and participate in preschool and kindergarten experiences.

What type of speech and language evaluation and treatment are needed?

What can I do to improve my child's ability to communicate?

Children with Down syndrome may need more language experiences or more practice to learn language concepts. Hearing problems related to fluid in the ear can make language learning more difficult. At home and in the community, you can help make words pop out of the background environment to help your child learn new words and concepts. Reading with your child and pointing out the words, asking questions and modeling the answers can be helpful. Some children with Down syndrome are beginning to read during the preschool and kindergarten years. Playing with words, rhyming words, and identifying initial sounds are activities appropriate for this age level. In preschool, teachers usually send home information on what concepts are being worked on in class (e.g. black and orange, circle and square for Halloween) which makes it easier to follow up with home experiences and practice. The following areas of speech and language should be evaluated and worked on in speech and language therapy, as needed:

I. Preschool Speech and Language Skills

- A. Comprehension (understanding, receptive language skills)
- B. Concept development
- C. Semantics (vocabulary)
- D. Morphosyntax (grammar and word parts)
- E. Pragmatics (social language in daily living)
- F. Oral motor skills

- G. Speech skills
- H. Expressive language skills
- I. Attending and regulation/sensory integration
- J. Pre-literacy skills

II. Kindergarten Speech and Language Skills

- A. Receptive language skills
- B. Expressive language skills
- C. Pragmatics
- D. Classroom language skills (language skills needed for school)
 1. Language of the Curriculum (vocabulary for school subjects, e.g., transportation)
 2. Language of Instruction in the Classroom (teacher's language)
 3. Language of the Hidden Curriculum (language for classroom success)
 4. Language of Testing (modifications and accommodations may be used)
 5. Language of Classroom Routines (lining up, procedures), communication and behavior)
 6. Social Interactive Communication (with children, teachers, and other adults)
- E. Speech skills (including oral motor skills, articulation, phonology)
- F. Literacy skills (early reading, sound identification, rhyming)

Where can I go for help?

Books, conferences and presentations will help you learn more about how to help your child with speech and language. Speech and language services may be available through your local school system through the IEP process, medical centers, community clinics (such as The ARC and Easter Seals), university clinics, and private practitioners. Your local parent support group is an excellent source of information to help in locating professionals in your area. For more information:

Kumin, L. (2003). *Early Communication Skills in Children with Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Kumin, L. (2002). Starting out: Speech and language intervention for infants and toddlers with Down syndrome, in Cohen, W., Nadel, L. & Madnick, M. (Eds). *Down syndrome: Visions for the 21st century* (391-402). NY: Wiley-Liss.

Kumin, L. (1999). Comprehensive speech and language treatment for infants, toddlers, and children with Down syndrome. In Hassold, T. J. & Patterson, D. *Down syndrome: A promising future, together*. New York, NY: Wiley-Liss, pp. 145-153.

Kumin, L. (2001). *Classroom language skills for children with Down syndrome: A guide for parents and teachers*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Schermerhorn, W. (2005). *Discovery: Pathways to better speech for children with Down syndrome, ages 2-8*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House (DVD).

www.ndsccenter.org

www.ndss.org

www.ds-health.com

www.downs-ed.org