This booklet offers practical, easy-to-read suggestions for teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents to help them understand language development and language disabilities. The first section highlights some of the factors involved in language development. The second section deals with some of the common causes for language disabilities and provides numerous suggestions for appropriate language activities. Cartoon-style drawings illustrate the text. This booklet should be especially helpful in the training of teachers and caregivers who work with handicapped children in a regular classroom. (CS)
UNDERSTANDING YOUNG CHILDREN:
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND LANGUAGE DISABILITIES

By
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Illustrated by
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Available from:  
Publications Office/IREC  
College of Education/University of Illinois  
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue  
Urbana, Illinois  61801

Price:  $1.25  
Catalog:  # 117

July 1974
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This series of five booklets offers practical, easy-to-read suggestions for teachers, parents, and caregivers working with normal and handicapped young children. Individual titles are:

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(Set of 5 booklets: $7.00)

The UYC Series was made available through the Alaska Treatment Center for Crippled Children and Adults, Anchorage, Alaska. We would like to thank the center's staff members for permitting us to reprint this series.
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LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Language development is extremely important in the growth of the child. A major part of learning depends on acquiring language, which is essential for almost all higher mental processes, such as thinking, planning, reasoning, paying attention, remembering and judging.

The development of speech and language, however, is dependent on other areas of growth.

Intellectual Development

I'm a smart kid. I will learn to talk OK.

I'm not so smart. It might take me longer to learn to talk.
Perceptual Development

I can see and hear OK. These skills will help me learn to talk well.

I have trouble seeing and hearing. I will have trouble learning how to talk well.

Emotional Development

I feel happy and good. I like to talk and I like to learn.

I don't feel happy. I don't want to talk. Learning isn't fun for me.
As in most other areas of development, language and speech abilities progress in a continuing manner, though periods may overlap, and the rate of progress may vary. Speech and language skills do not occur automatically, but must be learned. It is from the people he is most frequently exposed to that a child gets his language and speech abilities. The habits, good or bad, of those around him will become his habits.

Some definitions may be helpful in understanding the complex process of how a child learns to talk:
2. **Expressive language** is the ability to convey this understanding to others.

- **Gesture** (1)
- **Oral** (2)
- **Written** (3)
3. **Speech** is a system of vocal sounds used for communication.

Development of Language Structure

Initially, a baby uses reflex sounds and gestures as his language. Some mothers are highly skilled in telling what their babies are saying by the cries they hear.
Gestures can "talk" as well as words do. A baby who does not want his food may turn his head, pucker up his face, or push the food away.

If he wants to be held, he uses this gesture which is easily understood:
As he gets a little older, the child needs more advanced skills to express himself. First, however, he must understand what others are expressing to him (receptive language). Some basic words are easily learned by even very young children.
The first words that a child uses are usually nouns, and he uses them in the general sense; all men are Dada and all women are Mama.
He often uses one word to express a whole thought.

"Eat" in this case probably means "I want to eat."

Beginning with the one or two word phrase, a child quickly learns to pattern sentence structures based on the examples he has heard (from parents, teachers, other children). These structures change rapidly during the preschool years. At the age of a year and a half, approximately 60% of a child's vocabulary consists of nouns.
Between the ages of two and three, a child uses an increasing number of verbs and adjectives.

At about four, a child uses pronouns, connectives, and other parts of speech as adults use them.

Eventually, reading, and writing will become an important means of understanding and expressing language.
As the child learns to understand the meaning of words and sentences, he begins to build his vocabulary. At first he may only imitate what he hears, with little true understanding of what he is saying.

Eventually he develops a useful vocabulary of his own.
Language is important. Research reports seem to indicate that behavior learned with the use of language is acquired more quickly, and is more easily remembered, than what is learned without the use of language. After the age of five and a half, almost all new learning involves language. Skill in communication (speaking, understanding, reading, and writing) is a vital part of a child's general intellectual development.
### Speech and Language Ability Check

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child's Name</th>
<th>Birthdate</th>
<th>Date of Check</th>
</tr>
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</table>

**Languages spoken at home.**

- [ ] English
- [ ] Yupik
- [ ] Other

**Languages spoken at school.**

- [ ] English
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- [ ] Other

<table>
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- Child answers to name.
- Child tells his first name.
- Child tells his first and last name.
- Child holds up fingers for age.
- Child tells age in years.
- Does the child understand simple questions?
- Does the child use two and three word sentences?
- Is his speech easy to understand?
- Does he use "Baby talk"?
- Is he shy about speaking?
- Does he talk too loudly?
- Does he talk too softly?
- Do you think he hears poorly?
- Does he substitute sounds in words frequently, such as "t" for "s"?
- Does his voice sound strange - breathy, hoarse, nasal, gutteral, etc?

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LANGUAGE DISABILITIES
LANGUAGE DISABILITIES

The ability to communicate is an essential part of development. Some children have speech and language problems that make this part of development especially difficult for them.

There are various speech and language problems. Some may be receptive, that is, the child does not receive correct information about sounds and language. These are common causes for such disability:

1. Deafness - inability to hear correct sounds and language.

Joe... Joe... Joe!
2. Poor auditory discrimination - inability to distinguish between sounds.

Say "n-n-n-n-n"

3. Poor comprehension - lack of understanding, even though speech and language is heard properly.

Can you touch your nose?

What does that mean?

Can you touch your nose....?
There are also expressive problems. These include:

1. Aphasia - inability to speak, usually caused by damage to the brain.

2. Poor formulation - inability to use and organize speech to convey ideas.
3. Poor articulation - inability to produce language sounds.

Tandy id dood!

4. Poor vocabulary - knowing a limited number of words.

It flies... people ride in it... It's a... a...
5. Poor syntax - confused word order or non-use of certain parts of speech.

Go me the to school

We am running school.

6. Poor inflection - lack of voice quality in volume and pitch.

I talk so soft you can hardly hear me.
7. Fluency problems - disconnected speech. This is not considered a problem until age 6 or more. Pre-schoolers normally have some degree of non-fluency. If a three year old child repeats the s-s-s-s-sound, or a word like-like-like this, he is not necessarily a stutterer. He is just learning about speech and language and does not have the skill to put sounds together smoothly. Ignore this behavior. It is potentially dangerous to interrupt the child and ask him to start over again.
There are a number of causes for speech and language problems:

1. Deformity of the mouth, jaw, tongue, or larynx (voice box). These structures are used to produce sounds.
2. Poor or delayed motor control.
3. Brain damage or dysfunction.
4. Lack of stimulation. Language and speech are learned. If a child is not exposed to adequate language frequently, it will be harder for him to learn how to speak well than if he has had many good language experiences.

My parents and teachers provide lots of language experience for me.

Nobody talk much by me.
5. Bi-lingual environment. When children are learning two languages at the same time, they cannot be expected to be proficient in both during the pre-school years. They have to learn how to say everything in two different ways, and this takes longer than if they had to learn only one way to speak.

I have to remember 10 words to count to 10 in English.

I have to remember 20 words to count to 10 in Yupik and English.

6. Developmental difficulties. If a child is having difficulty in other developmental areas, his speech and language abilities can be affected. If he is having emotional difficulties, he may not be interested in communicating, or may be afraid of failure.

7. Motor difficulties may make it difficult for him to move his mouth and tongue properly for correct speech.

8. A child with intellectual difficulties may not be able to comprehend the complex thought processes often used in language. (Learning difficulties may make the development of language a difficult process.)
Detecting Speech and Language Problems in Children

These are some signs that may indicate real problems in pre-school children:

1. Child is not talking by the age of two.
2. Child does not use two and three word sentences by the age of three.
3. After the age of three, the child's speech is still very difficult to understand.
4. After the age of three, the child leaves off many beginning consonants and relies on vowel sounds (AEIOU). For example, he may say "ow mobile" instead of "snow mobile."
5. Child omits endings of words. He may say, "Ta ow my ha," for "Take off my hat."
6. After the age of five, child still produces faulty sentence structure, like saying, "Me store go," for "I am going to the store."
7. The child evidences non-fluency after the age of six (stuttering).
8. Voice quality is poor - too loud or too soft.
9. The voice is nasal-sounding, as if the child were talking through his nose.
10. He appears very shy and embarrassed by his speech. At any age, this indicates a problem.
Helping Children with Language Problems

The best thing a pre-school teacher can do for the child with language difficulties, is to provide him with many normal language development activities.

The book, *Teach Your Child to Talk* (by the staff of the Developmental Language and Speech Center), has a number of excellent ideas for such help. Material is divided according to age groups, and includes numerous suggestions for appropriate language activities.

*Sentence Building and Spontaneous Speech*, a report prepared by Ann R. Sanford (for the HCEAA Pre-school Project for Developmentally Handicapped Children at the Chapel Hill City Schools in North Carolina) lists these practical ideas:

A. Talk to child on toy telephone, asking questions about himself, his family, or some favorite topic.
B. Ask questions concerning picture book.
C. Make finger puppets and have children carry on conversations between puppets.
D. Dramatize simple story or poem.
E. Surprise box or bag - children feel objects and guess what they are holding.
F. Use walkie-talkie.
G. String can telephones.
H. Dress up in costumes to "play" other characters.
I. Place an interesting object inside a shoe box and cut a hole in the end of the box to stimulate a peepshow. Children tell what they see.
J. Obtain a very large cardboard box, paint it, and cut a door and two windows that will open and close. The children get in the box, open
and close the door, look out of the window, and hear or attempt to say, "I see you."

K. Play "tea party" and practice language over refreshments.

L. Arrange refreshments or toys on a table. Child must ask for something before he receives it.

Conclusion

Children with serious speech and language problems should receive professional treatment as early as possible. If you are very concerned about a child's speech and language development, contact the area public health nurse. She will be able to refer the child for a speech and language evaluation.
## SPEECH AND LANGUAGE ABILITY CHECK

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