



# Debunking Common Speech Therapy Myths



scan to read online

If you're a parent or caregiver concerned about your child's speech or language development, chances are you've done some research. There's a lot of information out there--some of which can be inaccurate, misguided, or incomplete!

That's why it's so important to be able to separate fact from fiction. As speech-language pathologists, it's our job to not only provide high-quality therapy to our clients, but education as well. The more you know about speech therapy and childhood development, the easier it becomes to make more informed decisions about your child's care.

# S T R U C T U R

## 01.

Myth #1: All children outgrow their speech or language delay

## 02.

Myth #2: Learning two languages at once causes speech delay

## 03.

Myth #3: Teaching a baby sign language will stunt their language growth

## 04.

Myth #4: Speech therapy is just for talking

## 05.

Myth #5: Children can't be tested for language concerns until they're in school

## 06.

Myth #6: Speech therapy is just playing with toddlers

## 07.

Myth #7: Boys start talking later than girls, so you shouldn't be concerned

# MYTH #1

The years of 0-3 are critical years for brain development and language acquisition.

It's true that every child is different and every child develops on their own timeline. However, while about 70-80% of children who are “late bloomers” will eventually catch up to their peers once they enter school, what about the 20-30% of children that don't?

Delays in speech and language abilities may indicate a larger cognitive or developmental issue that has not yet been diagnosed. It could also signal an underlying issue that can be difficult to detect at an early age. Language delays can lead to difficulty socializing with peers, participating in school, literacy and reading readiness, and more. Providing support can only help with all of these crucial skills later on down the road.

In short, the “wait and see” approach may be tempting, but it isn't always the right choice. Speech and language skills build upon one another, and the longer invention is delayed, the more a child can fall behind. Speaking with a speech-language pathologist can provide peace of mind and help you determine the best course of action.

# MYTH #2

This is one of the most common myths out there that continues to cause confusion among parents of bilingual children. It's also been put in the spotlight in recent years as more children grow up in bilingual households with multiple languages spoken.

**Here's the simple truth: raising your child in a bilingual household, or teaching them more than one language at once, does not cause a speech or language delay.**

This myth is most likely rooted in the common practice of "code switching," which happens when children (or adults) mix words from two languages into the same sentence. Many adults naturally code switch all the time in conversation. Children learn language by absorbing and mimicking those around them. They also have a more limited bank of vocabulary, and will often "select" a word from their other language when speaking to express their thoughts. This isn't a delay at all! In fact, it's quite resourceful.

Research continues to dispel any myth that bilingual children have a greater chance of being speech delayed. Conversely, think of the amazing gift you're giving your child by teaching them two languages. From cognitive advantages, to greater social skills, to being able to experience different cultures or speak with family members, the benefits of knowing two languages are endless.

# MYTH #3

**“If my baby learns signs to communicate their needs, won’t they be less likely to develop speech or language skills?”**

No. If anything, teaching a baby sign language in conjunction with a verbal model promotes language development.

Remember, before children say their first words, they use other forms of nonverbal communication to express their thoughts: crying, pointing, gesturing, etc.

Teaching simple signs and gestures enables your little one to express their wants and needs more easily than putting together the motor planning required for words. Using the sign for “more” is a lot easier for a child who hasn’t even said “mama” yet. And often, the more tools a child has to adequately communicate, the less likely they’ll need to resort to unwanted behaviors.

As a child’s imitation of sounds and words increases, these gestures typically fade out as they become unnecessary. Wouldn’t you rather your child gesture “all done” than throw the rest of their food onto the floor?

# MYTH #4

The term “speech therapy” may give the impression that it only covers issues relating to articulation, lisps, or stuttering, but in reality our profession diagnoses and treats a wide range of conditions.

For example, did you know that Speech & Language Pathologists also work on expressive and receptive language, early childhood development, pragmatic skills, cognitive rehabilitation, and safely swallowing and feeding? We also help with voice disorders and accent modification that may be affecting a person’s communication or with aural rehabilitation associated with hearing loss. But wait! That’s not all. Our profession also participates in crucial traumatic brain injury rehabilitation.

In summary, speech therapy covers an extremely large scope of practice for both children and adults.

# MYTH #5

While it's true that some sounds are developed later in childhood, the foundation of strong communication skills starts at birth.

Speech therapy can be appropriate for all children, regardless of age. In a child's earlier years, the most effective intervention involves coaching and educating parents on how they can promote language growth at home throughout their child's daily life. This is because children learn best in their home environment interacting with people they love most.

Using standardized tests, speech therapists are able to evaluate these critical developmental milestones at any age. Waiting until a child is in school may affect their ability to bond with their family or peers in a new setting. If a child is frustrated and having difficulty communicating, it's best to get ahead of these issues before they meet more complex communication demands at school.

# MYTH #6

This isn't so much a myth as it is a misperception about the effectiveness of play-based activities in promoting speech and language skills. It's understandable that play time could be thought of as a "break" from learning, but in reality, it's essential for toddlers.

Let's take the simple activity of rolling a ball back and forth with your child. It may seem simple, but think of all the new vocabulary your child is learning: go, roll, ball, my turn, your turn, fast, slow, stop, please. In addition to eliciting new words, this activity is key for teaching turn taking, sharing, cause and effect, and joint attention (when two people focus on the same task or activity). This back-and-forth exchange of rolling a ball also mimics communication - one person talks, the other responds.

Whether you're stacking blocks atop each other, pushing a toy car, or playing with a pretend telephone, these simple, guided, and structured activities are all key to helping children explore the world around them and learn foundational language skills. Plus, they're super fun! And the more children engage and participate, the more willing they'll be to learn.



# MYTH #6

This isn't so much a myth as it is a misperception about the effectiveness of play-based activities in promoting speech and language skills. It's understandable that play time could be thought of as a "break" from learning, but in reality, it's essential for toddlers.

Let's take the simple activity of rolling a ball back and forth with your child. It may seem simple, but think of all the new vocabulary your child is learning: go, roll, ball, my turn, your turn, fast, slow, stop, please. In addition to eliciting new words, this activity is key for teaching turn taking, sharing, cause and effect, and joint attention (when two people focus on the same task or activity). This back-and-forth exchange of rolling a ball also mimics communication - one person talks, the other responds.

Whether you're stacking blocks atop each other, pushing a toy car, or playing with a pretend telephone, these simple, guided, and structured activities are all key to helping children explore the world around them and learn foundational language skills. Plus, they're super fun! And the more children engage and participate, the more willing they'll be to learn.



Every child develops at their own pace. While some girls may reach their communication milestones earlier, that does not mean that parents and caregivers should not regularly monitor for signs of speech and language disorders or delays.

If you notice your child struggling to express their needs, understand others, or is falling behind their peers, it's important to consider speaking with a Speech & Language Pathologist and pursuing an evaluation, regardless of gender.

## NEXT STEPS

If you feel like your child has speech and/or language delays or you aren't sure, book an appointment with a DHA certified Speech & Language Therapist.

When researching and choosing a center to work with, it's incredibly important to find a place that has experienced clinicians and one that makes you and your child feel comfortable.