

The quiet child - Late Talkers

Introducing Gabby!

Gabby was brought into the clinic at 24 months of age due to her mother's concern that she was not communicating with words like other children her age. Her mother reported that she understood most things that she said, however, primarily communicated using gestures and grunting. Gabby had achieved her milestones of sitting, crawling and walking at an appropriate age.

Assessment

Assessment of Gabby's language was undertaken through informal observation of play with her mother and by using a standardised assessment that looked at her receptive (understanding) and expressive (talking) language. The standardised assessment used play activities and a picture book to elicit the desired responses from Gabby. Using this assessment, it was noted that Gabby's receptive language was advanced and was equivalent to a child of 3 years 5 months of age. She was able to understand expanded sentences, concepts such as 'more' and 'most' and identify items within a category such as 'animals'. Gabby's expressive language, however, was moderately-severely delayed. She communicated using sounds and gestures such as pointing to request items or help, and was reported to have used a couple of words such as 'mum' and 'dad' (infrequently), at home. Gabby did not show any interest in imitating words or in naming items or pictures. **Gabby is a late talker.**

What is a late talker?

A late talker is a child between 18 and 30 months who has typical development in the areas of play skills, motor skills, thinking skills, social skills and has a good understanding of language, however, has limited expressive vocabulary for their age. Late talkers are commonly children who have a family history of language delay, are males, babbled little an infant, a history of ear infections, and/or born with a low birth weight.

Typical Child language development

Understanding

By 12 months of age a child should:

- And respond to their own name
- Look at you when you talk to them
- Respond to 'no'
- Respond to words or phrases other than 'no' such as 'where is mummy?'
- Anticipate routines – for example he/she may anticipate the tickle at the end of 'round and round the garden'

By 24 months of age a child should

- Follow simple instructions and questions
- Point to their body parts
- Can understand 'action' and 'descriptive' words (jump, sleep, yummy)
- Give you a familiar object when asked (e.g. 'give me the ball') and identify pictures (e.g. 'where is the dog?')

Expressive language

By 12 months a child should:

- String sounds together (babble)
- Ask for objects by pointing and using loud sounds or single words
- Copy actions and/or words
- Using consistent labels for objects

By 24 months of age a child should

- Have approximately 200 words
- Use at least one pronoun e.g. 'mine', 'yours', 'me'
- Beginning to use 2 and 3 word sentences e.g. 'mum car', 'me want milk'
- Start a game with you, or begin a conversation

Intervention

Gabby and her mother attended the clinic for weekly sessions to target her expressive language skills. Intervention involved working in partnership with Gabby's mother who was taught strategies to encourage interaction with Gabby and language stimulation techniques to use through play during the week. Gabby spends most of her time with her mother during the week, allowing many opportunities for Gabby to receive intervention and language stimulation from her mother within her home environment. Gabby's mother would report back the following week, and if any difficulties were identified, these were problem-solved with additional time spent practising new techniques within the session.

Outcome

Within four months of therapy, Gabby was age appropriate for her expressive language. She had approximately 75 single words and growing, with up to 10 new words a week! She spoke often in two word phrases and had produced a few three and four word sentences. These results can be attributed to Gabby's mother who was dedicated to applying the strategies learned, regularly through everyday activities. Gabby will now be monitored with a follow up phone call on her third birthday to ensure that her expressive language has continued to develop and that she is producing the speech sounds expected for her age.

This case study demonstrates the benefits of early intervention for delayed language development. Research has found that children who have early intervention can help to minimize any secondary effects of learning difficulties at an older age when children begin to attend school. Early intervention also prevents negative impacts on a child's social, emotional and cognitive development.

If you are concerned about your child's language development, please contact Tyquin Group Speech Pathology for information on 3399 8028.