

## GROWING UP

### Toddlers Making Their Voices Heard

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

Parents and grandparents are all huddled around little Emma as she looks around at all of the attention she has garnered. Finally, she opens her mouth and the word “mama” pops out. All of the adults become excited as Emma says the magic word again. This type of moment is one that all parents patiently wait for as a toddler begins to talk. However, this can also become an area of concern when the child does not seem to talk as quickly or as much as siblings or other children the same age. Using other children as a point of comparison is an informal way of using benchmarks for speech and language development and it is typically the beginning of when parents to suspect a toddler could have a delay.

However, this informal method does not have to be the only way to spot delays. The speech and language profession has developed general benchmarks of speech and language development that parents can use to gauge their toddler’s progress. These benchmarks can start earlier than most parents realize.

While saying words is typically what stands out to most people when thinking about a toddler’s language development, delays can be spotted even earlier based on a toddler’s responses to language and sounds. By six months of age, an infant will respond to changes in the tone of a parent’s voice, notice toys that make sounds, and use many different sounds when babbling.

As the toddler gets older, she should understand words for common items and respond to requests before turning one year old. This is coupled with saying one or two words, imitating different speech sounds and communicating using gestures.

As a toddler gets between the ages of one and two years old, she will begin to know a few body parts, follows simple commands, and enjoy simple stories, songs, and rhymes. In addition, the toddler will continue to add new words to her vocabulary and will begin to put two word phrases together.

In general, girls tend to develop language skills faster than boys and first born children tend to develop faster than those who are second born or later. However, if your child is not meeting some of these general speech and language milestones, consult with your pediatrician. Pediatricians see a lot of children and typically can gauge if speech is delayed. If there is a suspected delay, an assessment by an audiologist and/or speech pathologist can find out for sure.

#### Biography:

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