

## Evaluation and Management of Suspected Speech Delay in Toddlers: Mild to Severe

If you or someone else are concerned about your child's speech, please know that we are here to discuss these concerns. In normal expressive speech pattern development, children generally say about 1-2 words by their first birthday, at least 3-5 words by around 15 months of age, and at least 5-25 words (or more) starting around 18 months of age. There is a huge range of "normal," though, and some children won't say much at all until closer to 2 or 2.5 years of age when it seems as if their vocabulary literally explodes!

Here is a link to normal speech and language milestones and informational materials which you may find helpful: <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/>

### ***What should I be looking for?***

In our minds, **red flags** for a possible expressive speech delay include, but aren't limited to:

- Little to no babbling by 4-7 months of age
- Saying only a few words by around 18 months of age
- Not putting two words together by around 2 years of age
- Loss of sounds or words that were previously used
- Poor oral-motor coordination (copious drooling in excess of what you'd expect with teething), pocketing food in the cheeks / feeding concerns

### ***Where do I begin?***

If your child isn't progressing the way you or we feel they should, there are a few "first steps" involved in evaluating suspected speech delays:

- Obtaining a formal hearing screen (while your child may have passed the hearing screen as a newborn in the hospital, we like to make sure they can appreciate all of the frequencies in the speech range and the only way to do this is with a formal audiology evaluation)
- Referring for a speech evaluation with a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP)

### ***What is an SLP?***

Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) are highly trained individuals who work with children to identify and treat speech and language issues of all sorts. They also work with infants and children who may additionally have poor oral-motor coordination or feeding difficulties, and later in childhood, children who have poor articulation, stutters, or lisps.

### ***Where do I take my child to be evaluated?***

There are several ways to obtain a formal SLP evaluation:

- Early Steps (through Duval County, free and available until a child's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday)
  - o Can self-refer or obtain referral through our office
  - o (<http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/early-steps/index.html>)

- Private speech evaluation (through insurance, requires referral from our office)
  - o There are numerous clinics throughout North Florida

### ***My child needs speech therapy, now what?***

If your child requires speech therapy, this is generally covered by your insurance for a certain number of sessions per year. Early Steps providers often travel to your home or childcare facility for therapy sessions; Private or hospital-based SLPs practice at their offices.

### ***What if my child is older than 3 years?***

For children involved with Early Steps who require on-going speech services through the public school system (or for kids who attend private/parochial school but who still need/want county-based speech services) past the age of 3, they transition to the Child Find Program through the Prekindergarten Exceptional Student Education Program

(<http://www.fdlrscrown.org/childfind.asp>). Children who are identified as having a speech delay after the age of 3 can also be referred to the Child Find Program. Through Child Find, children are evaluated and given an Individual Education Plan (IEP) detailing the type, frequency, duration and location of needed speech services. Children requiring services are covered by Child Find between the ages of 3 and 5.

### ***Grants and scholarships available to you: Not based on household income***

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) is offered free to all 4 year olds (and to 5 year olds whose 4<sup>th</sup> birthday falls between Feb. 2 through Sept. 1 in a calendar year) through Duval County. If your child has an IEP and does not attend school or attends a school that doesn't do VPK, you may be eligible for **VPK-SIS** (Specialized Instructional Services) funds through the Early Learning Coalition. What this means is that one can use VPK money outside the traditional VPK classroom to cover services like speech, OT, or PT done by providers authorized by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE). Please see the following link for more details:

- [http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/vpk/vpk\\_for\\_children\\_with\\_special\\_needs.aspx](http://www.floridaearlylearning.com/vpk/vpk_for_children_with_special_needs.aspx)

If you are curious about financial assistance which might help your child change to a different public school or to attend a private school, children with an IEP through Duval County are generally eligible for the **McKay Scholarship**. More information about this program can be found through the following link:

- <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/mckay/>

**The Gardiner Scholarship**, an additional source of funding available through the nonprofit organization Step Up for Students, is available to children who meet certain diagnostic criteria and who do NOT utilize the McKay scholarship.

- Eligible disabilities include: Autism spectrum disorder, Muscular dystrophy, Cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Phelan McDermid syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, Spina bifida, Williams syndrome, Intellectual disability (severe cognitive impairment), rare diseases as defined by the National Organization for Rare Disorders, anaphylaxis, deaf, visually impaired, dual sensory impaired, traumatic brain injured, hospital or homebound as defined by the rules of the State Board of Education and evidenced by

reports from local school districts, or three, four or five year-olds who are deemed high-risk due to developmental delays

- Please note that the severe speech disorder *apraxia* (described below) IS listed on the National Organization for Rare Disorders: <https://rarediseases.org>
- Information about the Gardiner Scholarship is available through the following link:
  - o <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/for-parents/special-needs/how-the-scholarship-works/>

***The SLP diagnosed my child with a severe speech disorder called “apraxia”, what do I do?***

If your child is identified by a Speech Language Pathologist as having the diagnosis of Childhood Apraxia of Speech (CAS), please know that you’re not alone! The apraxia community in Jacksonville is large and there are lots of excellent supports and resources both here and nationally.

- Apraxia Kids Organization (formerly known as CASANA) is located in Pittsburgh and they are infinitely available both in person for diagnostic consultations and through their website, which has a great deal of information. (<https://www.apraxia-kids.org>)
- American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) additionally has a huge amount of resources and explanatory information for parents and caregivers. (<https://www.asha.org>)
- On Facebook, there are two groups that may be of interest, Apraxia Kids and Apraxia Kids Jax, both are support and resource-based groups.