



Let's Talk

Down Syndrome: Speech, Language, and Swallowing Issues

“My daughter Kara has Down syndrome. She is 2½ years old and is learning to say many words. Her speech is hard to understand. She tries to show us what she wants. Her speech-language pathologist is teaching her sign language. She is using some signs, but I worry that it will keep her from talking.”

—Kelly

Children With Down Syndrome

Children with Down syndrome often have delays in:

- Motor skills, like sitting, walking, or using their hands
- Thinking skills, called intellectual disabilities
- Social skills
- Communication
- Feeding

They may also have health problems.

But, every child with Down syndrome is different. Each will have different skills and problems. You know your child best and will be able to tell others what he is good at doing.

As a baby, your child may have trouble eating and drinking. She may have problems hearing and may have other health problems. As she grows, she may be slow in sitting, walking, talking, and learning.

Will My Child Be Able to Talk?

Many children with Down syndrome have speech and language problems. But many children with Down syndrome are able to talk as they get older. Your child may have trouble:

- Understanding and saying words
- Putting words into sentences
- Asking questions

Fast facts

- Babies with Down syndrome can have trouble eating and drinking.
- As they grow, they may be slow in speaking and learning.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.



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- Starting conversations
- Speaking clearly
- Remembering new information

Hearing problems can make it harder for a child with Down syndrome to learn words and speak clearly. It is important to have your child's hearing checked.

How Can a Speech-Language Pathologist Help?

Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, work with people who have speech, language, thinking, and swallowing problems. An SLP can help your child at home, in school, and in the community. The earlier your child gets help, the better.

What Will the SLP Do?

Your SLP will work with you to find out what works best for your child. Your SLP may:

- Help your child learn to swallow safely
- Check your child's hearing
- Refer you to a hearing specialist, called an audiologist, if your child has trouble hearing
- Help your child learn to speak more clearly
- Teach you ways to help your child at home
- Help teachers and others talk to your child in a way that he understands.
- Give you ideas about other programs that may help your child, like playgroups or camps

Your SLP may work with a team to help your child learn. The team may include a doctor, an audiologist, other therapists, a nurse, a teacher, and your family. The SLP may suggest that your child see other specialists for more help.

What if My Child Can't Talk?

Some children take a long time to talk. Others may not ever be able to speak clearly or use words. If your child is slow to learn words, your SLP will help him learn other ways to communicate.

Your child may be able to communicate with:

- Hand movements, like sign language
- Pointing to pictures



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- Picking up or pointing to objects
- Electronic devices that can say the words your child chooses. This is called augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC.

Tips for Helping Your Child at Home

Your child needs to hear words and sounds all day long. She will learn best by watching you and copying what you do. To help, you can:

- Play games like pat-a-cake and peekaboo
- Help your child learn the names of objects and pictures in a book
- Use pictures to teach steps in self-care like dressing and bathing
- Talk about what is happening, like “I am washing dishes” or “You have a ball”
- Tell stories and nursery rhymes to your child
- Use the hand signs your child is learning and say the words for her

“Kara has started to use signs and words together. She also brings me a picture of a toy or object she wants. I can understand more of her words. We have made picture books of foods and toys she likes. She also likes me to read her stories. We are having more fun together.”

—Kelly

Down syndrome can cause communication and swallowing problems. Help is available.

To learn more about speech and language development or disorders or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

Appointment

Compliments of
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
and