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## Common Signs of Learning Difficulties in Preschoolers

Some days a child can't find the right word to express themselves. When you don't understand what your child is saying, they can become very frustrated.

Some preschoolers find it difficult to add new vocabulary and use the same language. Their limited vocabulary makes it hard for the child to express themselves. Many parents wonder if anything is wrong with their child and if their child will have learning problems in school.

During the preschool years, difficulty with language and speech may be indicators of a learning disability, or they may be warning signs. Warning signs are just that and don't necessarily mean problems. If parents are concerned, talking with their local early education program is a good place to begin.

Early intervention for the child who is behind in social, fine motor, gross motor, and/or language development can make all the difference between success and failure.

### Early signs

For most children, all the skills needed for early language are acquired naturally by the time they are five years old.

Prevention and intervention efforts are most effective during the preschool years and should be provided as early as possible if language and speech are to develop.

Parents are usually the first to suspect their child may have a problem, but they may deny the problem because they fear what it may mean for their child. The family is an important source of information about their child's needs.



Acceptance and cooperation are critical for effective intervention to occur. Appropriate support for the child, family and child care providers will help in recognizing, understanding and accepting a problem.



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Knowing the warning signs of learning disabilities and getting children the help they need can be key to acquiring the early literacy skills that are essential for later reading success. Research has shown that children may begin to develop phonological awareness (awareness of sounds in oral language) as early as two and a half to three years of age. At this level, children become sensitive to syllables and rhyme. Research has shown that the children most at risk for reading difficulties in the primary grades are those who began school with fewer verbal skills, less phonological awareness, and less familiarity with books.

We know that the greater the exposure to nursery rhymes at age three, the more developed the child's phonological awareness is by age six. When a child has more exposure to various kinds of reading activities, they will be more prepared for kindergarten. Results of early intervention prior to kindergarten are promising in reducing children's risk for reading difficulties.

Parents should trust that they know their child best. If parents have concerns, they can seek help determining if common signs of a learning problem are warning signs or indicators of a learning disability. Parents can talk to health care professionals, have their child's hearing checked, and work in partnership with their child's preschool teachers. Parents can also help their child play with language, listen to stories, tell stories, sing songs, draw pictures, and run and jump.

#### **Literacy tools for parents**

Your child starts learning to read from the moment they hear your voice. Hearing your voice, songs, and laughter makes your child take an interest in language. Language includes talking, listening, reading, and writing.

#### **You can help support your child in developing literacy skills by:**

- Play labeling games, such as asking, "Where is your nose?" and label objects in the environment, in books, etc.
- Talk with your child during regular activities.
- Reading aloud, every day, books that take into consideration the developmental needs of the child, such as a cloth book or sturdy cardboard and can be chewed on by babies.
- Go on outings and talk about new events and surroundings.
- Pick books that connect to a child's life and talk about those connections, such as reading Green Eggs and Ham and then asking, "What color eggs do you eat?"
- Predict what will happen next so that your child gets a sense of how a story is organized, with a beginning, middle, and end.
- Play with sounds, sing songs, listen to nursery rhymes, and identify rhyming patterns to promote awareness of sounds and words.
- Read predictable books to help your child understand how a story progresses and giving them a chance to pretend to read themselves.
- Use wordless books to help improve children's language and imagination.
- Encourage pretend play that relates to literacy activities. Such as pretending to read and write, making pretend books, and writing letters.
- Visit the library.

#### **Resources**

[National Center for Learning Disabilities](#)  
Materials for early learning.  
212-545-7510

#### [US Department of Education](#)

A list of early learning resources.  
800-872-5327