



Information for parents

Communication development in twins/multiple births.

Parents of twins/multiples often ask- will my children be slower to talk than their peers?

Just like singletons and other typically developing children, twins and multiples are at risk for speech and language difficulties, although there are a few issues specific to multiples. These issues include weight at birth, pre-maturity, and also factors within the family such as the time parents have to spend with the twins/multiples individually.

Twins can show signs of speech and language difficulties in the same way that singletons do, where there is delayed development of words and sentences and speech sounds are substituted or simplified. This may affect one or both twins.

An important factor is when the twins/multiples speak their first words. Generally speaking, children speak their first words between one year and 18 months. A child is considered a “late talker” if he/she is not putting two words together by age two; with a vocabulary of about fifty words. Parents may also be concerned if their child does not seem to be learning language at the same rate as their peers.

What is “twin language”?

As a parent you may have heard of “twin language”. In some cases twins have used a private language that is unique to them, alongside intelligible speech- this is rare and this form of language will generally disappear spontaneously. The use of this private language between twins doesn't seem to increase risk of language delay. As the children develop and become more easily understood by adults and those outside of the home, they are observed to use this ‘language’ less and less.

What can I do if my twins/multiples are late in talking?

If your twins/multiples are late to talk it is important not to assume that they will automatically catch up in time. It is a good precaution to take your children to see a qualified Speech and Language Therapist. The Speech and Language Therapist will assess your children's speech and language development and monitor their progress at regular intervals. The Speech and Language Therapist will also advise you on how to help develop your children's speech and language development. Parents can reduce their children's risk of developing a speech and language delay by employing the following strategies:

- Get into the habit of talking to one child at a time. When you give instructions, give the instruction to each child individually and then praise them individually when they have followed through on the task.
- Teach your children the importance of turn taking and good listening behaviour. As a parent, try to have one child finish their conversation with you. Make sure you listen to what your child has to say without interruption. When one child asks a question, answer that child directly.
- Create opportunities to talk to one child at a time. When you go for a family walk around the park, get one caregiver and twin to walk in one direction and the other caregiver and twin to walk in the opposite direction or have one parent and a twin leave earlier than the rest of the family. Try to bath the children at least once a week separately. You may think of other opportunities for dividing your time between the children, so that they have some special interactive time alone with you.
- Have your children's hearing checked regularly.

Please also see the IASLT website for general tips on how to develop children's communication abilities.

Helpful websites

www.iaslt.ie (Irish association of speech and language therapists)
www.iasltp.com (Irish association of speech and language therapists in private practice)

Reference

Bowen, C. (1999). Twins development and language. Retrieved from <http://www.speechlanguage-therapy.com/mbc.htm> on 23/09/09