



# Speech and Language Difficulties

## What are speech and language difficulties?

Language is a beautiful gift. It allows us to share our needs, wants, thoughts, feelings and everything that makes us human. When you spend time with your child, you have the power to give and nurture this gift of communication.

Many factors affect the rate at which a child develops language skills. Speech and language development can be thought of as a natural progression of stages in which a child passes through. However, the pace or exact age at which a child achieves his or her milestones may vary. Some factors that may contribute to how fast or slow a child learns speech and language include:

- Inborn ability to learn language
- Hearing loss or impairment
- Neurodevelopmental conditions, such as global developmental delay or autism
- Frequency and quality of language that a child is exposed to

If a child is slow in speech and language acquisition, he or she may have a speech or language difficulty.



## What are the signs of speech and language difficulties?

Age	Signs
<b>By 18 months</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Says less than 10 single words (e.g. ball, car)</li> <li>• Does not call papa or mama</li> <li>• Does not point to indicate wants, needs or interests</li> <li>• Does not follow simple 1-step instructions (e.g. "take bottle," "give papa")</li> </ul>
<b>By 2 to 3 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not name body parts/familiar items</li> <li>• Does not combine words to say 2 to 4-word phrases (e.g. "kick ball," "I eat biscuit," "mummy, push blue car")</li> <li>• Does not answer simple questions about objects and events around child presently (e.g. "what... doing?" or "where is the ball?")</li> <li>• Does not follow 2-step related instructions (e.g. "take your towel and go shower")</li> </ul>
<b>By 4 to 5 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaks in shorter sentences of less than 5 to 8 words as compared to peers</li> <li>• Does not tell simple stories or retell the sequence of simple procedures in day-to-day life (e.g. how to make a sandwich, going to toilet)</li> <li>• Does not use a wide range of vocabulary related to common objects, actions, shapes, colours, animals, prepositions (e.g. under/in front), and concepts (e.g. long/short)</li> <li>• Does not use pronouns (e.g. I, you, he, she)</li> <li>• Does not answer and ask 'WH' questions (i.e. who, what, where, when, why)</li> </ul>
<b>All ages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of previously acquired language skills</li> </ul>



## What are the treatment options for speech and language difficulties?

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If you sense that your child's language development is slow, you may wish to consult your paediatrician for an assessment or seek the advice of a speech therapist.

A speech therapist can work collaboratively with caregivers to:

- Assess your child's level of understanding and use of language through formal or informal tests
- Analyse your child's speech in various situations
- Determine factors that may be slowing language development
- Discuss next steps (e.g. strategies for stimulating language at home and/or enrolling your child into an early intervention programme)

Your child's progress will be closely monitored.

## What are some ways to stimulate speech and language development?

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Speech and language delays in children can be prevented by stimulating your child's language at his or her specific stage of language acquisition.

Here are some tips:

- Talk and read to your child often. Reading books and describing pictures to your child as early as six weeks can put him/her on the road to better speech and language development.
- Your child learns from daily interactions with adults. Use everyday situations and talk to your child about what he or she is presently doing or seeing (e.g. "You are eating an apple, and Mummy is eating a banana!"). Minimise the time your child spends on television or mobile and electronic devices. This provides more opportunities for play and interaction with your child.

## Additional resources on speech and language development

- Important milestones: your child by 2 years  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- Speech and language development  
[www.mottchildren.org](http://www.mottchildren.org)
- Activities to encourage speech and language development  
[www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)
- Language Delay  
[www.familiesforlife.sg/parenting](http://www.familiesforlife.sg/parenting)

## NUH Child Development Unit

NUH Child Development Unit is part of the Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute at National University Hospital. The clinic provides multidisciplinary assessments, therapy and holistic management of children with developmental & behavioural disorders from birth to 7 years old. Please make an appointment if you would like to see our paediatricians.



For health information and resources relating to child development, visit:  
<https://www.nuh.com.sg/cdu-resources>  
<https://www.nuh.com.sg/cdu>

### About the National University Centre for Women and Children

National University Centre for Women and Children (NUWoC) is a national university specialist centre that aims to empower women, children and their families to lead healthier lives. We provide comprehensive medical and surgical services ranging from pre-conception to child and maternal health.

NUWoC comprises the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology (O&G) and Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI) of National University Hospital. It focuses on the right-siting of appropriate services in the community and builds complementary services in National University Health System’s (NUHS) centres of excellence – Ng Teng Fong General Hospital and Alexandra Hospital.

Through a generous gift from the Estate of Khoo Teck Puat, KTP-NUCMI established an integrated outpatient facility with medical, diagnostic and rehabilitation services for children. We are also the only public specialist centre in Singapore that offers paediatric kidney and liver transplant programmes.

For more information about us, visit [www.nuh.com.sg/NUWoC](http://www.nuh.com.sg/NUWoC)

#### Children’s Emergency (24-hr)

Location NUH Main Building, Zone F, Level 1  
Contact +65 6772 5000

#### KTP-NUCMI

Location NUH Main Building, Zone E, Level 2  
(Accessible via Kent Ridge Wing, Zone C, Level 2, Lift Lobby C)  
Operating Hours 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri), 8.30am – 12.30pm (Sat)  
General Enquiry +65 6772 5736  
Appointment Line +65 6908 2222  
Email [ktpnucmi\\_appt@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:ktpnucmi_appt@nuhs.edu.sg)

#### 9a Viva-University Children’s Cancer Centre

Location NUH Medical Centre, Zone B, Level 9  
Operating Hours 8am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)  
Appointment Line +65 6772 5030  
Email [cbccappt@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:cbccappt@nuhs.edu.sg)

#### NUH Children’s Urgent Care Clinic @ Bukit Panjang

Location Junction 10, #01-22  
Operating Hours 9am – 11pm daily (including public holidays)  
General Enquiry +65 6219 1538  
Email [childreucc@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:childreucc@nuhs.edu.sg)

#### NUH Child Development Unit @ JMC

Location Jurong Medical Centre, Level 2  
Operating Hours 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)  
Appointment Line +65 6665 2530 / 2531  
Email [cdu@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:cdu@nuhs.edu.sg)

#### NUH Child Development Unit @ Keat Hong

Location Keat Hong Community Club, #03-01  
Operating Hours 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)  
Appointment Line +65 6769 4537/4637  
Email [cdu@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:cdu@nuhs.edu.sg)

#### Clinic A22 NUWoC Children’s Clinic @ NTFGH

Location Ng Teng Fong General Hospital  
Tower A – NTFGH Clinics, Level 2  
Operating Hours 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri)  
Appointment Line +65 6908 2222  
Email [appointment@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:appointment@nuhs.edu.sg)

## Our Patient Care Institutions

National University Hospital

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital &  
Jurong Community Hospital

Alexandra Hospital

National University Polyclinics

Jurong Medical Centre

National University Cancer Institute, Singapore

National University Heart Centre, Singapore

National University Centre for Oral Health, Singapore

NUHS Diagnostics

NUHS Pharmacy



Scan the QR code for more information on our patient care institutions.



Scan QR code for more information on NUWoC facilities.

OneNUHS Hotline: (65) 6908 2222

OneNUHS General Enquiries: [contactus@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:contactus@nuhs.edu.sg)

OneNUHS Appointments: [appointment@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:appointment@nuhs.edu.sg)

[www.nuhs.edu.sg](http://www.nuhs.edu.sg)

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