

Rule of Thumb for Speech and Hearing Month

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Sometimes it's just hard to know.

When spring is especially early and the risk of frost has tipped from imminent possibility to fading memory, is it too soon to plant geraniums? What is the probability of another snowstorm in March after an unexpected week of summery heat? When do babies, toddlers or preschoolers need help with their speech so that others can more easily understand them? Some questions are hard to answer with certainty, but experts in their fields have guidelines to help.

- Rule of thumb for gardening enthusiasts? Never plant annuals before May 24th.
- Advice from auto mechanics? Be in no hurry to retread the family car with all season tires before the end of March.
- Recommendations from speech pathologists? If your child's speech development doesn't fit the typical pattern, call your preschool speech and language program to find out more.

Children under five years of age typically learn how to create sounds, pronounce words and construct meaningful sentences all through these first years of life, but observant parents and caregivers can know when children need help.

Is your 6 month old babbling? Babies experiment with speech sounds early. Baby gurgles. Mom smiles and gurgles back. Baby gurgles again. Communication through turn-taking begins. Baby, watching dad talk, imitates the movements his mouth makes and says, "bababa". When "dada" sounds emerge, dad excitedly credits his brilliant baby as saying her first word. By 12 months baby uses three or more words meaningfully – words like dada, mama, and ball.

Is your 18 month old using at least 18 words? 18 words at 18 months is a catchy phrase to remember, though most speech pathologists would expect an 18 month old could use 20 or more words, and will add 3 to 4 new words every month after that.

Is your 2 year old putting two words together? By two years, children are moving beyond labelling objects or actions. They are combining their words to express ideas: "Mommy come", "More juice."

Is your 3 year old speaking in long sentences of 5 or more words?

Is your 4 year old understood by strangers almost all the time? Is he able to come up with simple rhymes; for example, cat and bat?

Notions that children who are slow to develop speaking skills will simply talk when they are ready, often inhibit adults from supporting children when they need it most. Fifty percent of all late talkers do need help with their communication skills. Parents who know the speech and language rules of thumb and who trust their instincts to seek help, discover that speech pathologists can give them the tools they

need to help their child. Research shows that the earlier children's hearing, speech and language needs are identified and supported, the easier it is for children to catch up or soar ahead.

When it's hard to know, it's good to ask. Early Expressions preschool speech and language program can help at 613-549-1232 or 1-800-267-7875 (ext 1184) or Hastings-Prince Edward Preschool Speech and Language program at 613-969-7400 ext. 2249.