



Will my child speak? How clear will his/her speech be?

If a child has sufficient hearing to be able to hear conversational speech (either with their residual hearing or with hearing aids or cochlear implants) and s/he is in an environment where those around him/her are using speech and good language interactions, they have the potential to learn to speak.

However, we need to be aware of the possibility of any other speech and language difficulties which may be present which will affect a child's ability to learn to talk and also of any other difficulties your child may have (40% of children with hearing difficulties have other physical difficulties).

The 'critical period' means a period of time in a child's early life when the brain is most receptive to learning language as the pathways in the brain are not yet set. As a child gets older, the pathways begin to set. The older a child is, the more difficult it is to learn spoken language if they have not spoken before. The effect of this will be that, if a child receives their first hearing aids or cochlear implants at an older age, and they have missed out on hearing spoken language during the 'critical period', they will have significant difficulties with learning spoken language. Therefore it is crucial, if your child has hearing difficulties and you want to increase chances of successful language learning, treatment and advice must be sought as early as possible.

It is impossible to predict what a child's speech will be like by just looking at their hearing levels. This is because two children whose hearing on testing looks exactly the same may show very different development and progress of their speech sound system. If a child has only mild hearing difficulties or has more significant hearing difficulties but has received a hearing aid or cochlear implant at an early age (preferably before one year old), they have the potential to develop age-appropriate speech and language skills.

If a child's hearing difficulty is severe or profound and hearing aids / cochlear implants are not available, appropriate or opted-for, the child will not have sufficient hearing to hear the sounds of spoken language and therefore will not be able to understand and develop clear speech. They will need to use a different method, likely signing, as their primary means of communication. A child with severe or profound deafness can learn to 'lipread' the speech of others to help them understand and, although they may develop some speech, this can be difficult for unfamiliar listeners to understand. This is because they are not getting the hearing feedback to allow them

to learn exactly how all sounds are made and to control aspects of speech such as pitch, volume and rhythm.

Written for DisabledChild-India by: Jenny Hinton, Speech and Language Therapist

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