



What is the difference between speech and language?

You may hear your therapist mention that we will be working on your child's speech and language goals. But what is the difference between the two? Are they the same?

Speech and Language are very different

Speech is the physical act of making individual sounds. It's the ability to say sounds clearly in isolation ('b'), syllables (ba), words (bag), and phrases (the cat is in the bag). Producing speech sounds is a complex skill that involves the coordination of your tongue, nose, lips, jaw, teeth, soft and hard palate, vocal cords and breath. This is why some sounds take longer to develop than others, depending on their complexity e.g. A child will be saying a 'd' sound a lot earlier than an 'r' sound and this is developmentally appropriate. Most children develop these sounds in specific order with typical sound substitutions e.g. 'v' sound generally is substituted by a 'b' sound up until the age of 6 years of age ('Berry' for 'very').

The rule of thumb is that children say what they hear. This is why it is important that your child wears their technology during all waking hours. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing may produce sound substitutions that are delayed e.g. (still saying 'berry' for 'very' at 7 years of age) or atypical e.g. fwing for swing. The 'f' and 's' sound have similar frequency information which means they may have trouble hearing the difference between the two sounds. If this is the case, you may want to check your child is accessing these frequencies clearly.

Language- the way we communicate our thoughts and feelings with the people around us. This can be through talking, understanding a message, but also through reading and writing. Language can be separated into receptive and expressive language.

Receptive Language (or Auditory Comprehension) is our ability to understand a message, instruction or command. This obviously differs depending on the child's age e.g. what a 2 year old understands is very different to a 4 year old. An example of this would be your child's ability to follow instructions e.g. Get your ball and kick it to dad vs. Before you open your books to page 6, grab a ruler from the green cupboard.



Expressive language (or Expressive communication) is the ability to use words, phrases, sentence and discourse to get your message across. Writing is also considered an expressive language skill, as you use a pen and paper to get your message. A child will only spontaneously say what they understand. If your child doesn't understand pronouns or plurals, they will not be able to use them appropriately when talking. E.g. a child may be able to say the 's' sound (speech), but may not be able to use it in a plural context (language) e.g. I see two dog!. Again, what a 2 year old can say is very different to what a 4 year old can say.

Speech and language can be assessed formally through standardised assessments. These assessments give us an objective score when comparing their speech and language development to other children their age. However, to get a full picture of your child's language development you must use both formal and informal assessments, as formal assessments rely heavily on compliance and how they are feeling on that day.