

Mixed results for late-talking toddlers

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New research findings from the world's largest study on language emergence have revealed that one in four late talking toddlers continue to have language problems by age 7.

The LOOKING at Language project has analysed the speech development of 1766 children in Western Australia from infancy to seven years of age, with particular focus on environmental, neuro-developmental and genetic risk factors. It is the first study to look at predictors of late language.

The latest findings have just been published in the Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research.

LOOKING at Language Chief Investigator Professor Mabel Rice said the findings were mixed news for parents worried about their child's language development.

“While a late start doesn't necessarily predict on-going language problems, most school aged children with impaired language were late talkers,” Professor Rice said.

“That's why it's essential that late talkers are professionally evaluated by a speech pathologist and have their hearing checked. We know that early intervention can greatly assist with a child's language development.”

Co-Chief Investigator Associate Professor Kate Taylor said the next challenge for researchers was to find ways to identify which children

were likely to outgrow the problem so that interventions could be targeted at those in need.

“Our study has previously shown that 13% of two year olds are late talkers and that boys are three times as likely to have a delay at that age,” Associate Professor Taylor said.

“What we now can see from our data is that by seven years of age, 80% of late talkers have caught up, and that boys are at no greater risk than girls. However, one in five late talkers was below age expectations for language at school-age”

Other findings from the LOOKING at Language project have included that a mother’s education, income, parenting style or mental health had no impact on a child’s likelihood of being a late talker.

By 24 months, children will usually have a vocabulary of around 50 words and have begun combining those words in two or three word sentences.

A second stage of the research is now looking at language development in twins.

Source: Research Australia

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