

5 NUMBERS

YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN OTTAWA

Frontline Reflections

Featured member: Roxane Bélanger, Speech Language Pathologist at First Words, Preschool Speech and Language Program of Ottawa.

LANGUAGE MATTERS AT ANY AGE: A child's experience in early years is pivotal for language development.

A child's brain grows faster in the first three years than at any other time in the child's development. Many factors, such as a child's relationships, experiences and environments, promote brain development. Communication grows from the positive and caring stimulation provided by parents, educators and other caregivers.



KNOW THE SIGNS: Language gives a child the best start in life.

Speech and language development is a common concern for many parents. Most babies develop normally, but 1 in 10 preschool children will present with a delay. Many of these children can be referred to as *babies who were late in using their first words and/or who were late-talking toddlers*. "Language skills predict a child's later success at school and in life. When it comes to language, earlier is better," says Marika Holmes, manager and speech language pathologist for the First Words program.

When helping families, you should:

- Know the milestones. Then you can plan developmentally appropriate activities and scaffold on children's abilities. It also allows you to support the families in the early identification of potential speech and language difficulties that the children may have.
- Refer if the parent is concerned. Research shows that parents know their babies best. Even a general concern about the child's communication development should be checked using the [First Words Communication Checkup](#) online screening tool.

ACT EARLY: It's never too early to refer.

Language skills give a strong start in school and in life.

- Screen to know: Use of the many screening tools available to you: [First Words Communication Checkup](#), [Nipissing District Developmental Screen](#), Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). Share your observations with the family.
- Screen with the [First Words Communication Checkup](#). If a child needs to be referred for a communication concern, parents can start the process online from the screening. Parents can also refer by calling the First Words Intake Office at CHEO or OCTC; find all the information on our new resource [Where to refer](#).

THE FIRST WORDS COMMUNICATION CHECKUP

This new online screening tool is available to families of children aged 6 months to 5 years living in the city of Ottawa. Use it to check your child's speech, language, social communication, fine and gross motor skills. And the best part - it's free!

In just 15-20 minutes, the First Words Communication Checkup provides instant results and next steps. If a child needs speech and language therapy, it connects families to the most suitable agency to support their child's developmental needs. It also allows families to get help quicker, by starting the referral process online or by phone. Assessment, therapy, and parent education are just some of the services offered by First Words.

WORDS COUNT! The impact of vocabulary on language and literacy.

Language development is key to a child's later success in life. Vocabulary growth is a strong predictor of a child's success with reading and at school. Hart & Risley (1995, 2012) showed that the *amount of different words children hear by age 3 is directly related to how well children can read at age 9*. And the children's future success is also linked to the amount of praise they receive. Here are some of the key findings:

- By age 3, children in more talkative families will have heard 30 million more words than children in less talkative families – a 30 million word gap!
- Children in more talkative families will also have received 400,000 more encouragements than children in less talkative families!
- By age 3, children from the most talkative and encouraging families scored approximately 25 points higher on IQ tests than children from the least talkative and encouraging families.
- These are lasting differences. Children's scores on vocabulary, language, and school tests at age 9 showed a strong connection with their word use at age 3 and praise received.

TALK EVERY DAY. Language grows in everyday activities.

To give children the best possible start with language, at school and in life, parents need to be engaged and responsive. When the parent responds to their child's energy level, interest and curiosity, they are really promoting social communication. Show and tell parents to:

- Be chatty. Talk to a child in daily activities, when dressing or feeding her; tell them about what they are doing, seeing (e.g. "I'm putting on your shirt with funny bunnies."), and use descriptive words (e.g. "Wow, that water is cold!"). Repeat the words often.
- Talk back. When baby babbles or when a toddler uses words, jump in and take a turn. Imitate their sounds and words, add words and gestures, and comment. When they wiggle or reach for things, use words, interpret and let them know they've made their point (e.g. "You want the big ball? Let's go get the ball!").

Play, sing, read. Young children learn socialization, turn-taking skills and new words during simple games like "peek-a-boo." Sing songs and nursery rhymes. Read often to children: point to objects in pictures and talk about what you see in books.

First Words Resource	Check out Help Your Child Develop Early Language on the First Words website.
First Words Webinar	Being the Bridge
Additional Resources	How a child's brain develops through early experiences

For the full list of First Words programs visit our website at www.firstwords.ca.

Submitted by:

