

- **Speech Sound disorder:** In this disorder, the child may have problems pronouncing similar sounds. The kid may add or change a particular sound, substitute a certain sound for another or leave the initial sound of the word. These are often referred to as articulation disorder or phonological disorder.
- **Childhood Apraxia of speech:** In this the brain is unable to send message to the speech muscles. The child knows what to say and probably can write it too but fails to move his tongue and mouth as it does not receive signals from the brain to do so.
- **Dysarthria:** It occurs when there is a muscle or nerve damage which are connected to the brain, mouth, lips, face, tongue or diaphragm. It causes slurred or slow speech and changes pitch and voice quality.
- **Stammering:** This is quite common and easily recognizable. It refers to interrupted speech or too many stoppages that hamper the flow of normal speech. This abnormality is fine until it happens occasionally but if it occurs quite often then it might disrupt normal speech flow.
- **Selective Mutism:** In selective mutism, the child avoids speaking in certain situations or places. He/she might be very open at certain places and absolutely silent at others. It often occurs in children who are shy or face anxiety issues.
- **Learning disabilities:** Early speech and language problems often lead to reading and writing problems at later stages

in life. Kids face an inability to spell, read or understand things.

### **Signs parents need to watch out**

Parents usually tend to ignore the early signs, mainly due to the lack of awareness and inability to recognise speech or language disorders.

Kids start learning and interpreting a language even before they turn a year old, being in a learning phase they tend to make mistakes. Most kids develop this skill and learn to pronounce various words and sounds by the age of five, while some may take longer than the expected age.

It is necessary to identify early symptoms and signs that reflect whether the kid is suffering from a speech disorder or not. There are certain age limits around which the kid is expected to learn few skills. Following parameters should be considered as a measure to understand if the child suffering from any language/ speech disorder.

- Kids usually start smiling and playing before learning to make any kind of sound. If the kid does not do so after a few weeks or months of birth, then you need to consult a speech therapist
- Before turning a year old, the kid should be able to identify the sounds of common objects and pronounce the names of people whom they interact with daily (like *maa* and *paa*)
- If the child is making sounds but isn't reacting to any sounds, then this might be an early sign of hearing loss which may also lead to speech disorder
- Around the age of 15-18 months, the kid should be able to deliver a variety of sounds and words
- As the child turns 2 to 3 years old, he/she should be able to form sentences and develop early reading and writing skills
- Certain letters take time to be understood and pronounced. The kid should be able to pronounce p, b, m, h, and w correctly by the age of 2 years.
- Kid should be able to pronounce k, g, f, t, d, and n correctly by the age of 3 years.
- Repeats or stretches letters like c-c-c-can or s-s-s-low (emphasizes more on starting letters).

Parents or caregivers must be able to recognise and analyse these signs and symptoms at the earliest. Consult a proper speech therapist at the earliest, with proper speech therapy and care, speech disorders can be treated and would help your child communicate better.

**Jayanthi Krishnakumar , Director & Co-founder, HearFon, Hearing & Speech Clinic**