CPNI
Cyprus Paediatric Neurology Institute
Παιδονευρολογικό Ινστιτούτο Κύπρου

LEAFLET FOR PARENTS AND PATIENTS

Speech and language delay

Children learn to talk at different rates. Some are late talkers who catch up on their own; others need extra help. Checking early, and starting support when it is needed, makes a real difference.

Speech, language and communication

These are related but different skills, and a child can have difficulty with one or more of them:

- Understanding: following what others say, such as simple words and instructions
- Talking: using words, then joining them into sentences
- Speech: saying sounds clearly, so that others can understand
- Communication: eye contact, pointing, gestures, taking turns and sharing attention

A rough guide to early talking

Children vary, so use this only as a guide. Understanding usually comes before talking.

Age	Most children...
12 months	Babble, turn to their name, and use gestures such as pointing and waving
18 months	Use several single words and understand simple instructions such as “give me the ball”
2 years	Use around 50 words or more and start joining two words, such as “more juice”
3 years	Use short sentences and are understood most of the time by family
4 years	Are understood by most people, including those who do not know them

If your child uses two languages, count the words in both together.

Possible causes

Often no single cause is found. Things we consider include:

- Hearing difficulties, including glue ear (fluid behind the eardrum)
- Late talking with no clear cause: many of these children catch up, but some need support
- Developmental language disorder (DLD), a long-term difficulty with understanding or using language
- Autism, where communication and social interaction develop differently
- Global developmental delay, when other areas of development are also delayed
- Childhood apraxia of speech, a difficulty planning the movements needed for speech
- Genetic conditions, and less often neurological conditions

Two languages at home

- Growing up with two or more languages does not cause speech or language delay
- Speak to your child in the language you are most comfortable with; this gives them the richest language
- Some bilingual children mix languages at first; this is normal

What happens at CPNI

- A detailed history of your child's development, health and family history
- An examination, and assessment of your child's understanding, talking and play
- We may arrange or recommend a hearing test, which every child with delayed speech should have
- Where needed, we may also arrange or recommend other steps, such as referral for speech and language therapy or occupational therapy, genetic tests, an EEG or a brain MRI
- We explain the findings, agree a plan with you and work closely with speech and language therapists

Therapy and support

- ✓ Speech and language therapy, often with activities for you to do at home
- ✓ Support at nursery or school
- ✓ Regular reviews to check progress and adjust the plan
- ✓ Treatment for any other difficulty that is found, such as glue ear

How you can help at home

- ✓ Get down to your child's level and face them when you talk
- ✓ Follow their lead: talk about what they are looking at or playing with
- ✓ Keep it simple, and repeat and add a word: if your child says "car", say "red car"
- ✓ Give them time to answer, without rushing or finishing their words
- ✓ Share books, songs and rhymes every day
- ✓ Limit screen time, and turn off the TV in the background when you play
- ✓ Praise their attempts rather than correcting mistakes

When to seek advice promptly

Please contact us or your doctor soon if your child:

- Loses words or other skills they had before, at any age
- Does not respond to sounds or to their name, or you are worried about their hearing
- Is not babbling or using gestures such as pointing by 12 months
- Has no words by 18 months, or is not joining two words by 2 years
- Has difficulty understanding simple instructions
- Has speech that is very hard to understand by 3 to 4 years, or a stammer that upsets them or lasts several months

Notes for your appointment

Write down the words your child uses, what you notice and any questions, and bring this to your appointment.

Date	Words or phrases my child uses	Questions to ask

Contact CPNI

Worried about your child’s talking? Call our office on +357 22 476 627 to arrange an assessment, or email cpni2007@gmail.com. We see children through GeSY, and privately if they are not GeSY beneficiaries, in Nicosia and Limassol.

More leaflets and information: www.cpni.com.cy

This leaflet gives general information. It does not replace advice from your child's doctor.

Reviewed by Dr Paola Nicolaides, Consultant Paediatric Neurologist, November 2026.

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