

## LET'S TALK!

Great emphasis has recently been placed upon understanding language development. The latest research indicates that babies are mapping the sound structure of language during the first 6 to 12 month of life. Most toddlers start linking words to meaning by their first birthday and have a vocabulary of about 20 words by the age of 18 months.

How do multiples compare to singletons in reference to language skills? Studies conducted on language development have shown that multiples are more susceptible to language delays and disorders. The general consensus among researchers is that twins between the age of three and five are about six months behind single-born children in developing language skills. However, after the age of five, twins seem to have the same language ability as singletons.

Certain biological and environmental factors play a significant role in determining whether multiples are more likely to develop language problems. Low birth weight and prematurity can make a child more prone to language delays. Some researchers maintain that social factors influence language development to a greater extent than biological factors. Multiples may receive less individually directed speech from their parents which can adversely affect their development of language skills. In addition, multiples hear the mispronunciations of words from each other, thus reinforcing improper speech. Misuse of plurals and pronouns also seems to be a common problem among multiples.

Speech differences have been found to be more prevalent in multiples with older siblings than in those who are firstborn primarily because firstborns have less competition for parental attention. Some experts believe that the lower a child's position in birth order, the more disadvantaged they are in terms of IQ scores. Therefore, there seems to be a disadvantage associated with having siblings (in terms of parental stimulation) and being a multiple is the most extreme case possible of having a sibling. Other researchers believe that identical twins have more speech problems than fraternal twins. Male twins have also been shown to have a greater chance of language delays than female or female-male twins. Elizabeth Noble states in her book, Having Twins: "Infant girls typically speak earlier and a first-born girl twin born at term reaches the same standard as a singleton."

Parents of multiples may be concerned that their children will develop a "secret language" which can hinder speech development. However, it's estimated that only 1 to 4 percent of multiples actually invent a secret language. Some multiples may make up words they share for certain items but few create a complete language. In cases where secret languages have been identified, children were typically left to entertain themselves with little interaction or stimulation from parents.

There are obviously several variables that influence language development in multiples as well as singletons. Being a multiple does not necessarily mean that a child will have language problems. Current research only suggests that on the average, multiples are more likely to experience speech delays. Luckily, there is no evidence that late talkers end up less fluent than early talkers. Most children will eventually catch up and their parents won't be able to stop them from talking!!

### Sources:

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First published December 1997 in "The Duet", Bucks-Mont Mothers of Multiples. All rights reserved to the publication and the author.