



Junior Kindergarten?



**Mommy,
wheo dis
boon go?**

It's that time!

The time some parents dread: their three or four year old is registered for junior kindergarten next fall. The worries are many: will their child be comfortable with all the new experiences, such as the bus ride, and recess? Will he be able to separate, or will he have to be extracted from the parent, crying? Does he have the readiness skills, such as knowing the letters in his name?

If the child also has speech or language difficulties, the worries are even greater. The potential for negative experiences because of communication problems is great: there could be misunderstandings, conflicts with peers, behavior problems and an impact on the child's sense of well-being. No parent wants this for their child!

Fortunately, the provincial government provides families with preschool speech and language (PSL) services to ensure these impacts are lessened, or prevented! There is no cost to parents, and the services can be easily accessed by calling HNHU Preschool Speech and Language Program @ 519-426-6170 Ext. 3243, or register online at hnhu.org/speech.

However, there is now a lengthy wait for assessment. The earlier a referral is made, the better! If a child is referred at the time of kindergarten registration or orientation, there are still many programs he could benefit from!

Children must be referred before June 30th in the year they begin Junior Kindergarten.

So, don't wait!

If you are having trouble deciding whether a child could benefit from an assessment by a certified speech-language pathologist (SLP), check out these milestones:

By 3 years old, a child should:

- Understand "who", "what", "where" and "why" questions
- Create long sentences, using five to eight words
- Talk about past events (such as their trip to grandparents' house, or their day at daycare)
- Tell simple stories
- Show affection for his/her favorite playmates
- Engage in multi-step pretend play (such as cooking a meal, fixing the car)
- Have a beginning interest in rhyming
- Be understood by most people outside of the family most of the time (75%)
- Be aware of the function of print (know the words in the menu mean food, the words on the shopping list, signs on the road)

Many children age 3 years are making grammatical errors and speech sound errors that are considered USUAL for their age. Some examples include:

Mommy, wheo dis boon go? (Where DOES this spoon go?)

Deletions of "s" from blends (like in spoon) are usual between ages 3 and 3½. Difficulties with question-formation are also quite common. Our English grammar is quite complex, and requires that word-order is reversed when a child asks a question. Children need adult models to figure it out.

INDIRECT CORRECTION is the best way to help a child learn these tricky sounds and grammatical forms. That means, repeat what she says, and simply emphasize the better way (*Hm, where DOES this sssspoon go?*). Direct correction (*No, don't say 'boon', say 'ssspoon'*) frustrates children. The frustration of being corrected interferes with actually learning the better way! Try to avoid directly correcting a child.

PRAISE if the child attempts is also very effective. For example, if you hear the child try: *Ya, wheo DOES dis boon go?*, give specific praise (*Oh, I like how you ask 'where DOES this spoon go!'*).

More examples of usual errors follows:

A doggie don't eat cawwots! (A doggie DOESN'T eat carrots!)

Errors for "r", "l" and "th" are usual. Some children have difficulty with these sounds until to grade two. By age 3 ½ years, "s"-blends begin emerging. That means they use some, but not all. For example, your child can say 'swim' but still says boon for spoon. Errors marking the negative are also usual, since we have so many of them in English (*not, don't, can't, isn't, doesn't, etc.*).

My bonne bob tiko falled! (My sponge bob sticker FELL!)
It's on my sue! (It's on my shoe!)

Some children also have difficulty with "sh", "ch" and "j", but make substitutions that are very close (*suze* for shoes; *dzump* for jump). Irregular past tense forms (like *ran*, *went*) are another complex grammatical form that may take until the end of senior kindergarten to figure out. When do you add '-ed' (*pulled*), and when don't you (*runned*)?

Irregular plural forms are also difficult: when do you add 's' (*cats*, *dogs*) and when don't you (*mice*, *sheep*)? Adult models are critical, so that kids can figure it out.

If weeves come in my house, I use a bacuum (If leaves come in my house, I use a vacuum!)

Finally, the "v" sound may be replaced at the beginnings of words, but is starting to emerge in other positions (such as in the middle of the word 'leaves').

These are some reasons why a less familiar person might have difficulty understanding what a three-year old has to say. But hopefully, they understand about 75%.

By 4 years old, a child should:

- Follow directions involving three or more steps (such as first, get some paper, then draw a picture, last give it to mom)
- Use adult-type grammar
- Tell stories with a clear beginning, middle and end
- Talk to try to solve problems with adults and other children
- Demonstrate increasingly complex imaginative play

- Match some letters with their sounds (such as Letter T makes 'tuh')
- Be understood by less familiar people almost all the time (95%)
 Be able to generate rhymes (such as *hook, book, hey, that rhymes!*)

Many of the errors highlighted in the above examples will continue to persist with a few exceptions: by age 4 years, children should



**A doggie
don't eat
cawwots!**

be using "s"-blends. Their expressive language becomes more adult-sounding, with very few grammatical errors. They are using negative forms, plurals, "-ing" endings (*playing*, *sleeping*), and most of the "little words" (is, are, a, the). They are able to form most questions properly. Most of their grammatical errors are due to irregular forms (*ran*, *mice*).

What about "lisps"?

There are two types of lisps: interdental and lateral. The most common is INTERDENTAL, which happens when a child uses tongue-between-the-teeth posturing. This may result in a distortion of "s", "z", "sh", "ch" and "j" sounds (they sound more like "th").

LATERAL posturing means the sides of the tongue are depressed during production of "s" and "z" (and others). The resulting distortion can be described as 'slushy' sounding.

For some children, the distortion causes misunderstandings, while many children still have perceptually accurate sounds in spite of the posturing. The key element to consider is whether the posture interferes with how much of the child's speech can be understood. If the 3 year old is still understood 75% (by less familiar people), and the 4 year old is nearly always understood, then the lisp is not impacting articulation.

In Summary

Don't worry about "l", "r", "th" or errors with irregular past tense or plural.

Do worry if less familiar people have trouble understanding your 3 or 4 year old.

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