

FREE PARENT GUIDE

10 Signs Your Child May Need Speech Therapy

A practical, no-jargon checklist to help you decide whether
it's time to talk to a speech-language pathologist.

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Hi, I'm Kelsey.

I'm a licensed speech-language pathologist (M.S., CCC-SLP) and the founder of Speech EZ. Over the years, I've worked with hundreds of families across California, Arizona, and Wisconsin — all of whom started in the same place: **unsure whether what they were noticing was a real concern, or something their child would simply grow out of.** Today, I'm licensed in Arizona and Wisconsin and serve families across both states online.

The honest answer is — sometimes kids do grow out of things. But the difference between waiting and acting can be six months of frustration, a year of avoidance, or a child who quietly stops trying. Early support is almost always easier than late support.

I made this guide to give you a clear, parent-friendly way to look at your child's communication and feeding patterns. Each sign below is something I see every week in my practice. If three or more of these feel familiar, it doesn't mean something is wrong — it means a conversation is worth having.

How to use this guide: Read through the 10 signs below. Mentally check the ones that match your child. Most of them list the age range when they typically become a concern — so a "late talker" sign at age 18 months looks very different than the same sign at age 3.

And if you ever want to skip the guesswork, a free 15-minute discovery call with me is always an option. No obligation, no pressure — just clarity.

The 10 Signs

1 Limited or no spoken words

TODDLER · 12-24 MONTHS

Your child has fewer than ~20 words by 18 months, or fewer than ~50 words and isn't combining 2 words by age 2.

Why it matters: Late talking can resolve on its own — but the children who do best long-term are the ones who get language support during this window, not after it.

2 Strangers can't understand your child

PRESCHOOL · 3–4 YEARS

By age 3, an unfamiliar adult (a babysitter, a teacher, a relative) should understand your child about 75% of the time. By age 4, it should be close to 100%.

Why it matters: Children who can't be understood often stop trying — and avoidance is much harder to reverse than the original speech issue.

3 Persistent sound errors past the expected age

SCHOOL-AGE · 4+ YEARS

Some sound errors are normal at certain ages (a 3-year-old saying "wabbit" is fine). But /k/, /g/, /f/, /v/ should be in place by age 4, and most kids master /r/, /s/, /l/, /th/ by age 7.

Why it matters: Past kindergarten, sound errors can affect reading, spelling, and how confidently a child speaks up in class.

4 Stuttering or sudden disfluency

ANY AGE · USUALLY 2.5–5 YEARS

Repetitions of whole words ("I-I-I want") are common in young kids. But repetitions of single sounds or syllables ("wuh-wuh-want"), prolonged sounds ("sssssee"), or visible struggle (tense face, blocking) are signs to watch.

Why it matters: Early intervention with stuttering has the strongest research evidence of any area in our field.

5 Difficulty following age-appropriate directions

PRESCHOOL–SCHOOL-AGE

Your child consistently struggles with two-step directions ("Get your shoes and meet me at the door") at age 3+, or gets lost during multi-step routines.

Why it matters: This often signals a receptive language issue that flies under the radar — kids learn to nod, mimic peers, or check out instead of asking for help.

6 Trouble forming sentences for their age

PRESCHOOL · 3–5 YEARS

Single-word answers when sentences are expected, frequent grammatical errors past age 4 ("him going store"), or a vocabulary that feels much smaller than peers.

Why it matters: Expressive language directly predicts later reading comprehension and writing — earlier support means easier school years.

7 Frustration or avoidance around talking

ANY AGE

Tantrums when not understood, refusing to talk in certain situations, pointing instead of asking, or saying "I can't" before trying.

Why it matters: This is often the first sign parents notice and the last one they connect to speech. Communication frustration is a behavior signal — not just a behavior problem.

8 Difficulty chewing, swallowing, or coordinating eating

ANY AGE · USUALLY 12 MONTHS+

Trouble managing certain textures (gagging, pocketing food in cheeks, can't break down meat), uncoordinated chewing, weak lip closure that loses food, or visible jaw fatigue during meals.

Why it matters: These are oral motor signals — the muscles aren't doing what they need to do. They respond well to myofunctional therapy and oral motor exercises with a trained SLP. (Sensory-based picky eating is different and benefits from a feeding-specialized SLP — we'll happily refer you.)

9 Mouth breathing, open-mouth posture, or noisy sleep

ANY AGE

Mouth typically open at rest, breathing through the mouth during the day, snoring, restless sleep, or daytime fatigue.

Why it matters: These are myofunctional patterns that can affect facial development, dental alignment, sleep, and articulation. They're treatable — but most parents are never told it's something an SLP can help with.

10 Suspected tongue tie or feeding/latching trouble

ANY AGE · INFANT-ADULT

Difficulty latching as an infant, inability to lick the upper lip or stick the tongue out past the bottom teeth, or being told a frenectomy is needed.

Why it matters: At Speech EZ, we always try therapy first. Many tongue-tie symptoms resolve with myofunctional therapy alone — surgery is sometimes necessary, but rarely the first answer.

What to do next

Tally up how many signs you mentally checked.

If you checked 0–2 signs:

You're likely seeing typical development with maybe one area to keep an eye on. Re-read the relevant sign in 2–3 months and see if anything has shifted. If anything starts impacting school or family life, reach out.

If you checked 3–5 signs:

It's worth a conversation. Many of these signs are connected — a child with feeding issues often has myofunctional concerns, for example. A 15-minute discovery call can help you understand whether an evaluation makes sense, and what it would actually look like.

If you checked 6+ signs:

Don't wait. The signs cluster for a reason, and a comprehensive evaluation is the fastest path to a clear plan. The good news: with focused therapy, most kids make meaningful progress within the first few months.

Book your free 15-minute discovery call

No forms, no commitment — just a quick conversation with me about what you're seeing and what your options are. I'll respond personally within 24 hours, often the same day.

[Get in touch →](#)

Speech EZ · Online speech therapy across Arizona & Wisconsin
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