

Universal Indicators of Developmental Language Disorder

Slower acquisition of language milestones than siblings in primary language (parent report).
Universal norms: 12 months—first spoken word; 18 months—50 spoken words and the child is putting two words together; 24 months—200-300 spoken words and the child is speaking mostly in short phrases.

1. Difficulty communicating at home in the primary language
2. Reliance on gestures rather than speech to communicate
3. Family history of special education/learning difficulties
4. Deficits in vocabulary; word retrieval problems and use of general all-purpose (GAP) nouns and verbs instead of more precise vocabulary
5. Verbal and written definitions of words are vague and lack detail
6. Difficulty describing the function of objects (e.g., “what is this used for? What do you do with it?”)
7. Short mean length of utterance; sentences that are too short and simple for the child’s age, even in the primary language
8. Specific difficulty with morphology in both the first language and English, especially verb tense
9. Working memory deficits (e.g., repeating digits and nonwords back)
10. Lack of organization, structure, and sequence in spoken and written language; difficulty conveying thoughts; poor narrative skills
11. Inordinate slowness in responding to questions; long latencies or pauses before answering
12. General disorganization and confusion, including prolonged difficulty with basic routines
13. Difficulty paying attention
14. Need for frequent repetition and prompts during instruction
15. Need for a program of instruction that is more structured than that used with most similar peers
16. Inappropriate social use of language (e.g., interrupts frequently, digresses from topic, is insensitive to the needs or communication goals of conversational partners, cannot stay on the topic of discussion, cannot take turns in conversation)
17. Difficulty interacting with peers from a similar cultural and linguistic background
18. Overall communication skills that are substantially poorer than those of similar peers