

Kidding Around

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Otitis Media and its impact on speech and language development

By Karen A. Francioso-Howe,
MS CCC-SLP

You may not think of speech and language development as being related to health. In fact, there are many factors which can contribute to a child's delayed speech and language development. One important health-related issue that affects many children during the critical years of language development is recurrent otitis media (fluid in the middle ear as a result of an ear infection).

Otitis media is a common illness in children from infancy to three years of age. Many children exhibit multiple episodes of middle ear infections which are treated medically. Parents feel comfortable once their child is treated. However, parents may not realize that during the recurrent episodes of otitis media, their child may

not be "hearing" well and is receiving inconsistent auditory information (sounds, words, etc.) Fluid in the ear blocks out auditory information and makes speech less intelligible and more "muffled." The child may not hear specific speech sounds, word endings (past tense) and may "tune out" language because speech is too difficult to hear and interpret. He may exhibit an articulation delay (pronouncing sounds incorrectly) or an expressive language delay due to a history of recurrent otitis media.

During an episode of otitis media, the child actually exhibits a temporary loss of



hearing until the ear infection is healed. Sometimes an ear infection does not heal and becomes chronic. The child then exhibits a "hearing loss" for a long period of time. Therefore, it is very important to recognize

the impact otitis media has on speech-language development. Parent should monitor their child's ear infections, noting how many she has and how long they last, and visit the pediatrician for a medical check-up. If otitis media persists, parents should consult with their pediatrician or an ear, nose and throat specialist for a medical consult. Hearing status should be monitored by a certified au-

diologist following treatment to make sure the ear infection has resolved and hearing status is restored.

The American Speech, Hearing and Language Association supports the facts that chronic otitis media can impact a child's speech-language development. Parents can visit www.asha.org for more information regarding speech development and for referrals to a speech-language pathologist or audiologist.

Karen Francioso-Howe is a pediatric speech-language pathologist who has a private practice in Easton MA. Her areas of interest include speech disorders, child language and autism/pdd.