Infant and Toddler Communication Delay: Is This Your Child? . . . Is Early Intervention the Answer?

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The most common symptom of developmental disability in children under three years of age is delayed communication development; Dr. Louis V. Rossetti, one of the most prolific authors on the topic of early childhood intervention, states that this affects approximately 5% to 10% of this vulnerable population. Additionally, it is widely accepted that communication skills are the greatest predictor of later intelligence attainment and school performance (Rossetti, 2001: 1). It is information such as this that has placed Early Intervention (EI) at the forefront of treatment and legislation. Early intervention for communication delays for infants and toddlers (infancy to three years) comprises assessment of a child and their environment, followed by treatment, if necessary, which includes the family. Speech and Language Pathologists work closely with the family in determining goals due to the age of the child, and the vital component of the child’s environment.

My bigger research question is how a parent or caregiver is to know if their infant/toddler needs assessment. Professionals have identified a chronological pattern of language development in children from infancy (prelinguistic, skills/non-verbal), to preschool age (language skills/verbal). When a child strays from age appropriate acquisition of language, early assessment by a Licensed Speech and Language Pathologist is mandated. A close look at contributing risk factors (environmental, biological, or both), is essential in establishing the goals of treatment.

Further, my research will provide information for parents regarding this critical course of action: a parent must know what is considered normal language development for infants and toddlers, the risk factors contributing to communication delay, legislation in place to serve those in need of early intervention, and the efficacy of the intervention. Parents of a child with any disability and/or communication delay are faced with many emotional decisions. I hope to provide crucial information to help alleviate the stress many parents experience in the process of facing assessment and treatment.