



**WV AG Bell emphasizes the importance of Early Intervention for Hearing Loss and Communication Disorders During *Better Hearing & Speech Month***

***Families Should Seek Help Immediately If Child Shows Signs of a Hearing Loss, Speech or Language Delay***

With speech and language disorders among the most common conditions that young children experience, parents and caregivers are urged to learn the signs of communication disorders—and seek an evaluation now if they have any concerns. The message is a timely one, as May is national **Better Hearing & Speech Month (BHSM)**.

Many parents have questions about their child’s hearing, speech, language, or social communication skills but are often told by family, friends, or even other professionals to wait and see if their child outgrows a potential problem. “Unfortunately, this often results in a delayed diagnosis of a disorder that is highly treatable—particularly when caught early.

It’s especially important to be vigilant now, as some children who traditionally would have been recommended for hearing, speech and language services by a daycare provider or pediatrician may have been missed due the pandemic—since many kids remained at home, with more limited interaction with these professionals. Families should know that early intervention services are still available at this time, even if they have been modified due to the pandemic, through WV Birth to Three. Now is the time to act on any concern.

**Here are some signs of a hearing, speech or language disorder in a young child (age 3 and under):**

- Does not smile or interact with others (birth and older)
- Does not babble (4–7 months)
- Makes only a few sounds or gestures, like pointing (7–12 months)
- Does not understand what others say (7 months – 2 years)
- Says only a few words (12–18 months)
- Says words that are not easily understood by others (18 months – 2 years)
- Does not put words together to make sentences (1.5–3 years)
- Produces speech that is unclear, even to familiar people (2–3 years)

**Here are some of the key benefits of early treatment:**

- ✓ **Maximizes a child's success.** Treatment at any age is worthwhile, but earlier is usually most effective. Early treatment can reduce the need for school-based services later.
- ✓ **Saves time and money.** It can take less time to treat a hearing loss or communication delay when families act on the early warning signs. Fewer treatment sessions can also mean fewer out-of-pocket expenses. WV Birth to Three early intervention programs offer free services to children ages birth to 3 years and their families. They also can link parents to other community supports.
- ✓ **Prepares a child for kindergarten.** What happens between birth and age 3 lays the foundation for kindergarten readiness. Strong speech, language, cognitive, and social skills are necessary for reading, writing, and academic success—as well as all the other demands of school.
- ✓ **Sets a child on a course to school, social, and life success.** All families want what's best for their children. Acting early can have positive, long-lasting effects on a child's communication, social relationships, learning, and daily life activities well into adulthood.

## **Children with Hearing Loss Can Hear and Speak**

Some babies are born with hearing loss. Other children are born with normal hearing and begin to have hearing problems as they grow older. No matter the reason for the hearing loss, parents often struggle to understand, accept and sometimes even to act. These feelings are normal.

Alexander Graham Bell Association (AG Bell) is committed to equipping families with the tools needed to take action. We provide parents and professional with information about language development, early intervention, hearing technology and more that can help ensure each child has the opportunity to develop language on par with children who have no hearing loss.

Learn more about the benefits of early identification and treatment at [www.agbell.org](http://www.agbell.org) or at **The Language and Learning Lab** at Marshall University <https://thelatmu.com/> or contact [wvagbell@gmail.com](mailto:wvagbell@gmail.com) # # #