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Mounting Evidence that Mothers Overestimate Language Development



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Founder / Director

In the past, it was common that language development challenges in children would be identified clinically based on an initial expression of parental concern.¹ Studies have shown that when mothers express a developmental concern, a developmental delay is found to exist 80% of the time.² This means parental concern has "high specificity," but does not answer the question of "test sensitivity." We have previously written about the work of Willinger and Eisenwort published in 2005. Even among a group of children who had been referred for speech / language assessment, they found that mothers failed to identify delayed vocabulary development 96% of the time.³ Recently Willinger and Schaunig repeated that study with a larger, more generalizable group.⁴



All previous studies on the sensitivity of parental concern recruited only clinically-referred children. In the present study, researchers recruited 108 children age 3 to 6 from several preschools. Children were given the *Active Vocabulary Test*. Their mothers were given the same test and asked to estimate what their preschooler's performance would be. **Mothers overestimated their children's language development in 100% of tests.** The children had a mean test score of 45.3, and the mother's mean estimate was 73.8.

The current study improves the data supporting the long-standing conclusion that **childcare professionals should not rely on parental assessment alone to trigger language development screening.** Instead, the responsibility to recognize language delay or disorder must go to relied-upon professionals such as healthcare providers, teachers, and counselors. Five to eight percent of children under the age of five demonstrate developmental impairments of speech and language.⁵ Problems with primary language delay or disorder continue into adolescence and beyond 30% to 60% of the time.^{6,7} Studies reveal a connection between language delay and underachievement in school, social problems, emotional problems, and behavioral problems.⁸⁻¹⁴ Timely introduction of qualified, pediatric speech/language therapy can help children with primary impairments of speech and language.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

When you suspect a language delay or disorder, you can recommend an objective, expert assessment at Emerge - A Child's Place. Parents may find a full speech therapy assessment helpful in objectively determining the needs of their child. At Emerge, a qualified pediatric speech therapist can assess any suspected impairment, objectively compare a child's performance to established measures, and provide a frank discussion with parents. When therapy is indicated, Emerge can help improve the odds for children with developmental delay. Doctors, counselors, and teachers can provide a very important service by screening for and identifying potential problems that are often less noticable to a preschooler's parents and recommending an assessment at Emerge - A Child's Place.



Affordable Care at Emerge – A Child's Place

Many parents find that insurance coverage for pediatric occupational or speech therapy is often limited. In these cases, Emerge has even more to offer in addition to uncompromising quality of care and excellent facilities. Even though the quality of care at Emerge is at the highest levels, you will find the fees at Emerge to be the most affordable.

Please tell parents about Emerge – A Child's Place
Believing in a Child's Potential to Flourish

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