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Sesame Family Newsletter Archive

News and Notes from the Workshop
Posted by Jordan Brown

SESAME FAMILY NEWSLETTER---Delayed Speech
August 20, 2003

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***WALKING AND TALKING

My son Finn, an energetic toddler, loves to tour our neighborhood. Running around the block, he points out all the fascinating sights... well, fascinating to a 2 and a half-year-old. If you had been eavesdropping on us today as we walked our dog Mo, you would have heard the following conversation:

FINN: (pointing to the side of a building) A/C! A/C!
ME: Wow! You found an air conditioner.
FINN: (pointing up) More A/C! More! More!
ME: That's great. You found another A/C.
FINN: (pointing to both of his discoveries) Two! Two! (pointing to the first one) A/C on! (pointing to the second) Off!
ME: What else do you see?
FINN: Dwain! [drain] Dwain down! (noticing that the drain that is broken) O-bah! [Finn-ese for "old one"] (pointing to another drain) New one! (finding a payphone) Pone! Pone! (pointing to the receiver) Wehwoh! Wehwoh! [yellow]
ME: What are you looking at?
FINN: Beet! Beet!
ME: Huh? (Finn points to a dumpster, propped on block "legs") Oh, feet! Yea, those do look like feet.
FINN: (as our dog makes a pit stop) Mo poop! Pee! (running to the side of a building) Ho! Ho! [hose] Pop! Pop! [referring to his grandfather, who lets him spray the garden]

A trip around the block can take an hour--and a lot of patience. Seeing him today, it's hard to believe that six months ago, he was barely speaking. Back then, he occasionally said "dada," "no" or the nonsense sound "dee" but that was about it. My wife Ellen and I marveled at how much he clearly understood, but wondered if Finn would ever start talking. (Since he wasn't saying "grandma," my mother-in-law briefly considered changing her name to "No" so that at least Finn would say it.)

Would he benefit from seeing a speech therapist? we wondered. Or should we just let him progress naturally at his own pace? We remembered that Finn took longer than usual to learn to walk. Then, without any intervention, our son developed into an athletic and coordinated kid. So, what to do? If, like us, you have questions about your child's speech development, take a look at these informative articles from Sesame Workshop.

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LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: TWO TO FIVE

By the time a child reaches age 5, he will use language as self-expression.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=776>

SLOW TO SPEAK

At the age of 3, my son is barely talking. What would cause a speech delay like this? Should he see a speech therapist?

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=801>

SPEECH PROBLEMS

My 5 year old has trouble pronouncing her R's. Should we take her to a speech therapist?

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=896>

SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

When should my child begin speaking in full sentences?

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=873>

TODDLER TALK

If your toddler isn't as talkative as his peers, you probably have no cause for concern.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=1029>

***SPEECH THERAPY

At Finn's 18-month check-up, our pediatrician asked, "About how many words does he say?" We told her basically none. She said that his development otherwise seemed normal or above average, but the fact that he wasn't talking yet was possibly something to be concerned about. She suggested that we have him evaluated by Early Intervention--a nationally funded program run by each state's Department of Health. This program is designed to identify toddlers under 3 who are developing at a slower pace, and provide therapy to help them catch up. She said that after an extensive evaluation, if Finn qualified, the state would provide free support services in our home.

Ellen and I thanked the doctor for her suggestion, but declined for the time being. We told her that we weren't especially concerned yet. We marveled at Finn's physical coordination, comprehension, and problem-solving skills, and reasoned that all his energy was focused on these areas of development. We didn't want to put undo pressure on him, and figured that his speech development would happen soon enough. We had heard many stories of bright people (including Albert Einstein, and our neighbor's son) who didn't start speaking until age 3 or 4. Besides, our hunch was that Finn's delayed speech would improve the way his physical coordination had. The doctor approved of our plan to wait six months. If he was still not talking much by then, we agreed to set up an appointment to have him evaluated.

About a week before the sixth month deadline, we attended a family reunion for my grandma's 95th birthday. At this occasion, Finn had a blast playing with his cousin Dan, who is just a week older than Finn. Ellen and I were amazed how verbal Dan was, eagerly imitating the conversations around him with remarkable articulation. My sister reassured us that Dan is one of the most talkative kids in his daycare group. Nevertheless, the contrast between Finn's and Danny's verbal abilities inspired me to call an Early Intervention organization for an evaluation.

They tested his hearing, which turned out fine. They also asked if he'd had many ear infections (he's luckily had none). Based on extensive reports from a pediatrician, a speech pathologist, and others, however, we confirmed that Finn's speech abilities were far below normal for his age.

Since Finn had excellent listening comprehension, the speech therapist suggested that Finn might have a speech disorder called

verbal apraxia. Kids with apraxia take longer than usual to get their mouth muscles to work properly. I was told that when Finn's brain wanted to say words, his mouth couldn't cooperate. The Early Intervention center recommended that Finn see a speech therapist three times a week, supplemented with a special education teacher two times a week.

At first Finn was apprehensive, but soon he began looking forward to the visits from the therapist and the teacher. They played lots of games to encourage him to talk, and expand his vocabulary. Knowing Finn's fascination with the moon, the teacher read him a pop-up version of PAPA, PLEASE GET THE MOON FOR ME by Eric Carle. To help Finn exercise his mouth muscles, the therapist suggested we give him lots of crispy, crunchy food with interesting textures. To stimulate his tongue and lips, she tickles his tongue with an electric toothbrush, or puts a tiny bit of sweet, sticky stuff on his face, so that he has to really stretch his tongue to get it.

Finn's progress was slow. After three months, he was able to say maybe ten words. We were relieved that despite his lack of words, he was still a very happy child. Every now and then, he'd surprise us by saying new words out of the blue. One day, while getting him ready for a nap, I was rounding up all his sleepmates: dog, blanket, bear, and baby. When I couldn't find his baby, I said, "Hmmm... Where's the baby?" A moment later, Finn said, "Where da baby?" Three words. I was blown away.

Around the fifth month, he went from being the "strong silent type" to being a chatterbox. He started naming all his toys, pointing out colors, identifying characters in books and on TV, saying types of food, and more. To encourage his new found voice, my wife and I provided many opportunities to show-off. Whenever he tried out a new word, we would give him enthusiastic encouragement, and involve the word in his favorite games.

At the same time, we continued to read up on speech development. Here are a few articles from the Workshop on this topic.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: BIRTH TO TWO

Your baby pays attention to the pitch and volume of adult speech.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=729>

SPEEDING UP SPEECH

What to do with a 2-year-old experiencing speech delays.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=999>

BABY TALK

How your older child helps teach the baby to speak.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=781>

SINGLE PARENT EQUALS VERBAL KIDS?

Some children of single working parents have better language skills than kids from some two-parent households.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=977>

***THE JOY OF OPPOSITES

We're thrilled that Finn now knows hundreds of words. When it comes to teaching Finn new words, Ellen and I have discovered that Finn is wild about opposites. If we can present a word, and pair it with its opposite, he'll master it quickly. Some of his favorites are: on/off, in/out hot/cold, old/new, big/small, fast/slow, high/low, sun/moon, and mom/dad. Last month, while shopping for a rawhide bone for Mo, our dog, we asked Finn to pick out which one he wanted. We tried to point him toward one of the smaller bones appropriate for a cocker spaniel, but Finn grabbed a HUGE bone, almost the size of his arm, and said, "Big bone! Mo!" We all had a good laugh!

For fun with opposites, check out these games at Sesame Workshop.

GROVER'S SUMMER DAY MAKE-A-STORY
<http://www.sesamestreet.com/gwr?s=nl&t=14420>

TELLY IN SPACE MAKE-A-STORY
<http://www.sesamestreet.com/gwr?s=nl&t=105881>

ELMO MINDS THE FARM
<http://www.sesamestreet.com/gwr?s=nl&t=2220>

***SESAME STREET MUSIC WORKS

Although the medical experts don't have a fancy word for it, Finn is also a "late singer." Although he loves listening to a variety of recorded music, and enjoys plunking the piano keys, he has yet to sing his first note. Last year, whenever anyone would start to sing a song, he'd scream in protest. We were mystified why recorded songs were fine but live performances drove him nuts. (Was our singing that bad?!) In the last few months, he's gotten much better at letting others sing to him. As part of his bedtime routine, we sing a few of his favorites, such as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," and "Young at Heart." We seem to have the most luck with made-up songs that involve important things in his life. (Don't worry, I'm not going to share the timeless lyrics of our classic "A/C" or "old drain" songs.)

Finn loves to hear his favorite Muppets sing, so at least once a week, we tune into Sesame Street Radio.

SESAME STREET RADIO
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=105602>

***THE PLUS SIDE OF A LATE TALKER

Having a late talking toddler does have its advantages. For example, I know that when we're riding on the bus, he's not going to blurt out, "Hey, dad, why does that man have a big nose?" I also know that any confidential conversation I have with Ellen in front of Finn isn't going to be loudly recounted by Finn in the middle of the local supermarket.

With a little prodding, Finn now proudly says those magical words, "I wuv you, Mommy. I wuv you, Daddy." Ah, it was worth the wait!

Hope you enjoy the rest of your summer.

***SESAME STREET BEAT

Next week on Sesame Street, Mama Bear is pregnant and Baby Bear is slowly realizing all of the changes that will take place when she has the new baby. He begins to worry he will not be loved as much by Papa and Mama Bear with a new baby in the house.

Will Baby Bear realize Mama and Papa will love him just as much as they ever have? Check your local PBS station to find out when this episode is airing where you live. Then extend the learning with these activities.

PBS KIDS: WHERE DO YOU LIVE?
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=9697605>

THE LETTER OF THE DAY IS X
Color Baby Bear and his X-rayed hand in this printable!
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=3074>

TELLY'S CRAYONS
Use the clues in this game, to help Telly and Baby Bear find hidden crayons.
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=7209016>

BABY BEAR BUILDS A SNOWMAN

Help Baby Bear find different objects in this snowy game.
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=1292>

Another infant who lives on Sesame Street is baby Natasha. A furry, pink monster, Natasha speaks only in gurgles and makes life difficult for all of her babysitters! Kevin Clash, who is also the Muppeteer for Elmo, performs and is the voice of Natasha.

Jordan Brown
Sesame Workshop

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