

ECA-APER SURVEY ON THE PANDEMIC OF LANGUAGE DELAYS AND BEHAVIOUR SKILLS

Early Childhood Association and Association for Primary Education and Research was receiving more than 10 queries every day about teachers facing issues with language delays and behavioral issues especially attention issues and violent behavior.

We conducted this survey with over 5300 teachers and parents to understand the issues and have also listed pointers to guide them with solutions.

1. ARE YOU NOTICING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT DELAYS IN THE STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS?
2. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS ARE EXHIBITING SIGNS OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT DELAYS?

PLAYGROUP	NURSERY	JUNIOR/SENIOR KG	GRADE 1/2
YES	YES	YES	YES
25%	25%	20%	15%

3. ARE YOU NOTICING INCREASED HYPERACTIVITY IN STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS?
4. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS ARE EXHIBITING SIGNS OF HYPERACTIVITY?

PLAYGROUP	NURSERY	JUNIOR/SENIOR KG	GRADE 1/2
YES	YES	YES	YES
25%	25%	20%	15%

5. ARE YOU NOTICING INCREASED ATTENTION DEFICIT IN STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS?
6. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS ARE EXHIBITING SIGNS OF ATTENTION DEFICIT ?

PLAYGROUP	NURSERY	JUNIOR/SENIOR KG	GRADE 1/2
YES	YES	YES	YES
25%	25%	20%	15%

7. HOW MANY HOURS DOES YOUR CHILD SLEEP AT NIGHT?

	PLAYSCHOOL	NURSERY	JUNIOR/SENIOR KG	GRADE 1/2
8-10 HOURS	35%	30%	20%	28%
7-8 HOURS	30 %	35%	25%	35%
5-6 HOURS	20%	25%	30%%	22%
4 TO 5 HOURS	20%	10%	25%	20%

8. HOW MANY MINUTES OF OUTDOOR PLAY OR EXERCISE IS YOUR CHILD GETTING EVERY DAY?

	PLAYSCHOOL	NURSERY	JUNIOR /SENIOR KG	GRADE 1/2
LESS THAN 1 HOUR	70%	65%	75%	65%
MORE THAN 1 HOUR	30%	35%	25%	35%

9. ARE YOU AS A PARENT STRESSED ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S LANGUAGE DELAY/ INATTENTION/ ABILITY TO COPE? (PERCENTAGE OF EACH GIVEN OUT OF 100)

	PLAYSCHOOL	NURSERY	JUNIOR/SENIOR KG	GRADE 1/2
LANGUAGE DELAY	40%	45%	40%	45%
BEHAVIOUR AND ATTENTION ISSUES	35%	38%	56%	65%

The survey brought out the following facts-

1. More than 40% parents are noticing a language development delay in their children
2. Over 40% parents are struggling with attention and behavioral issues
3. Teachers are noticing 20% of their students displaying attention and behavioral issues
4. Teachers surveyed reports more than 20% of their students have delays in communication like children learning to talk later, or talks less or uses gestures like pointing instead of talking. Social developmental delays like a child doesn't respond to their name when called, doesn't look at what adults are paying attention to in the environment, or doesn't play with other children or even exhibits violent behaviour when playing with other children.
5. More than 20% students are having language development delays.
6. Grade 1 and 2 Teachers reported that more than 20% of students lack a sense of personal boundaries and often cling to the teacher. They have to be dragged to school every day and take at least an hour to stop crying. . When they are uncomfortable or upset, they scream (some at a pitch that pierces the ears!) kick and throw things. –
7. 60% children get less than one hour of outdoor play or exercise every day
8. Only 25% children are getting their correct duration of sleep- 8-9 hours most children are sleep deprived

The pandemic impacted the following which is continuing-

1. Parents were working round the clock and interaction with children suffered leading to language development problems
2. Children were not able to play outdoors leading to social development and conflict resolution and physical development issues
3. Sleep time of the whole family had gone for a toss, which is continuing as a habit.
4. Pandemic babies were learning to speak later than pre pandemic babies and even simple actions like pointing and saying 'bye bye' were not seen in pandemic babies

According to experts,

1. Decrease in sleep is associated with increase in hyperactivity
2. Decrease in time exercising is associated with increase in inattention
3. And higher levels of parent stress, are associated with increases in child inattention.
4. Meaning there wouldn't have been anybody to say „bye-bye“ to. Babies also tend to point when they see new things that they want, but if they weren't going outside, they would have already known about everything in their environments.”
5. Language delays are tied up with emotional development and social development- because they are unable to work through their emotions using language they are using their bodies to show their frustration.
6. Dr. Susan Byrne, a pediatric neurologist at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland , [put it this way](#): “A lot of these babies were at home and not seeing many people leave, meaning there wouldn't have been anybody to say „bye-bye“ to. Babies also tend to point when they see new things that they want, but if they weren't going outside, they would have already known about everything in their environments.”
7. Language delays can frustrate children as they are unable to communicate their needs and find it frustrating to see the stress and anxiety on their parent's faces.
8. In school they are unable to talk to friends and respond to teacher queries and this frustrates them and it translates into shrieks, shouting, kicking and throwing things

9. 3 and 4 year old's "get their feeling of safety from their parents," explains Lofrgren, an infant mental health specialist. "And Mom and Dad have not been feeling OK for two years now — which is almost their entire life."

ECA and APER recommend the following-

Is change possible? Can we rewire children's brains?

Neuroscience experts like Suskind state that every emotional experience – every environment, every interaction – gives instructions to a young child's brain, telling it which neuronal connections to make stronger and which it doesn't need and can prune away. During the pandemic children's brains were continually exposed to stress, and the brain wire with the assumption that the environment is always going to be like that. If the same environments become Safe, nurturing, and responsive with positive interactions then they will foster healthy brain development and impact neuronal connections.

For Language delays we recommend the following-

1. Go through the language milestones given in the document- Development Matters of EYFS-UK
2. If there is only a slight difference, it is ok, nothing to worry about, every child develops differently.
3. If there is a huge difference like a 3 year old is displaying the milestones of a 1 or 2 year old then ensure that a pediatrician is involved and take guidance.
4. Also remember every parent and teacher has 'a gut feeling' about the delay, if so, follow the guidelines given here to nurture language skills
5. Please understand that lack of proper language skills for the right age can lead to children becoming frustrated and cranky, and this will translate into discipline issues, in that case use the guidelines given here to support the child on the path to positive behaviour.

Support strategies to use for children with language delays-

1. **Home language first-** because we enrol children in English medium schools we judge children on their ability to speak English but that is incorrect practice. In children with language delays let them first learn to speak in their home language, this will give them confidence. Some children may learn both languages with ease, but remember every child is different. So if the child is talking and communicating in home language but unable to talk or communicate in English then it is not a language development delay.
2. **Language rich environment-** just like reading is nurtured in print rich environment, language is nurtured in language rich environment. Talk to children, sing songs, tell stories in the language you want them to pick up.
3. **Get children talking-** the child will want to speak if there is something to speak about! So ask open ended questions that prompt the child to speak. Sing songs and leave a line unsaid, and prompt the child to complete it, do the same with stories. Slowly and steadily children will start with words, sentences and then conversations
4. **Expand children's sentences-** when children are learning a new language they tend to reply in one word answers or point and say only one word. Like when they see a friend, they may just say 'Yash', when they do that expand their sentences and say, "yes, that is Yash your best friend, you like to play with him."
5. **Have more conversations-** conversations are like a ping pong match, there is serve and return, Remember just giving instructions and questioning children all the time is not language motivation! Start conversations with children and help them participate
6. **Clap with words or hop with words-** talk to children and clap on each word or play a game and hop on each word. Its – time- to – keep- your- toys- away. This will attract children to participate. In the beginning they may only clap or hop with you but soon they will start sounding out the words.

The more interesting you make language; the more children will participate. Remember to keep stress away.

Support to give children for discipline and behaviour issues-

1. **Be a role model**
2. **Use stories**
3. **Use emotion faces-** place different emotion faces to help children identify their mood or feeling, this helps them communicate their feelings and the teacher will be able to give the required support
4. **Avoid shaming-** While shame may cause the child to halt the immediate behavior, it does nothing to teach positive alternative behavior.
5. **Time out is not a solution-** the imposed external control of the time out inhibits a child's ability to build internal controls and may cause a child lasting feelings of being ineffectual.
6. **Use games and songs-** Games like 'Simon or Shivaji says", help children wait for the prompt and control their urge of action. Songs that teach children about manners, behaviour, will help children learn and strengthen good behaviour.
7. **Give positive reinforcement-** Usually to a violent or misbehaving child we are saying 'no' or 'why did you do that', or 'don't talk', 'don't hit', etc. they are only hearing negative reinforcements, it's time to give them some positive reinforcements, so when they are not throwing things or pushing etc. you can say, 'Samiksha I am so happy to see you playing with others.' The more you reinforce what is acceptable behaviour the more they follow it to seek your attention.

The pandemic effect is not yet over, and it will need trained caretakers like teachers and parents to help children overcome the impact on their language and socio-emotional skills. This survey was done to highlight that the issues still exist and to support caregivers to help children overcome them so that they do not turn into a severe lasting problem.

For more details of the survey please contact President of Early Childhood Association and Association of Primary Education and Research, Dr. Swati Popat Vats on 7506639870/ 9819121384 or ecapresidentindia@gmail.com