

Understanding Echolalia

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A child that uses *echolalia* repeats messages or words that he/she hears other people say. Because of this, echolalia is often called “parroting” or “echoing.” Echolalia is actually how most children learn language. It is a part of normal language development. Most children “grow out of” echolalia by 30 months of age. Children with autism spectrum disorders and other disorders may not “grow out of” this stage.



A child demonstrating echolalia may repeat conversations, videos, book read-alouds, songs, etc. When repeating these things, the child will often use the exact rhythm and tone of the original message. Echolalia, after 30 months of age, can be a characteristic of Tourette’s syndrome, and some forms of autism spectrum disorders.

When a child uses echolalic language, he/she processes chunks of information rather than individual words. Although the child may be using sophisticated language with lengthy sentences, higher level vocabulary, and advanced grammatical forms, the child often doesn’t understand the meaning of what he/she is repeating.

Types of Echolalia

There are two basic types of echolalia: immediate and delayed. *Immediate echolalia* is when a child repeats something he/she just heard. For example, an adult says, “Would you like some juice?” and the child repeats back, “Would you like some juice?,” instead of answering the question.

Delayed echolalia is when a child repeats something he/she heard hours, days, weeks, months, or years before. He/she does not necessarily repeat the words or phrases immediately after hearing them.

Echolalia and Autism

Echolalia in children with autism can be a good sign. It is often an indicator of future language development. It may be a sign that the child is at least processing language even if at only a surface level. With speech and language therapy the child can build and use more meaningful language.

Children with autism may also be repeating what you say as a way to lower anxiety and/or buy themselves more time to understand your message before responding.

Tips for Working With Children With Echolalia

- Use a consistent style of language
- Keep facial expressions and gestures simple and clear
- Be specific
- Be direct
- Limit vocabulary
- Be detailed with instructions
- Avoid sarcasm
- Explain humor, metaphors, and idioms
- Break tasks down into simple steps
- Practice social skills (e.g., starting a conversation, maintaining a conversation)
- Use yes/no questions
- Give the child time to respond
- Speak in a calm voice

If you think your child may have echolalia, meet with your child's teacher and/or a speech-language pathologist for diagnosis and treatment.

Resources

Access Autism. (2008). Retrieved June 2, 2008, from <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/communication/echolalidelay.html>

MedicineInc.net. (1996-2008). Retrieved June 2, 2008, from <http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=26315>

SPDSUPPORT.org.uk. (2007). Retrieved June 2, 2008, from <http://www.spdsupport.org.uk/echolalia.html>

Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below will help your child with language development. Visit www.superduperinc.com or call 1-800-277-8737. Click the links below to see the product and description.

Practicing Pragmatics Fun Deck®

Ask for Item #FD-52 http://www.superduperinc.com/F-G_Pages/fd52.htm

Say and Do® Social Scenes for Home School, and Community

Ask for Item #BK-316 http://www.superduperinc.com/B_Pages/BK_316.htm

Idioms Fun Deck®

Ask for Item #FD-14 http://www.superduperinc.com/F-G_Pages/fd14.htm

Metaphors and Similes Fun Deck®

Ask for Item #FD-72 http://www.superduperinc.com/F-G_Pages/fd72.htm

Granny's Candies®

Ask for Item #GB-154 http://www.superduperinc.com/F-G_pages/gb154.html

Granny's Candies® - Set 2

Ask for Item #GB-155 http://www.superduperinc.com/F-G_pages/gb155.html