skills on the hill pediatric therapy

Speech Delay or Just a Late Talker?

How to tell the difference - and when to act

"He'll talk when he's ready" is sometimes true - and sometimes it misses a window when early help makes a big difference. Here's how to think about it.

NOTICE	TRY	BUILD	CONNECT	GROW

Helpful idea

What's a "late talker"?

Helpful idea

A toddler (18-30 mo) with good understanding, play, and social skills but few spoken words. Many catch up - but not all.

Green flags (usually reassuring)

Understands what you say and follows directions

Points and gestures, plays pretend, makes eye contact

Tries to imitate sounds and words

Red flags (worth a call)

No gestures by 12 months; no words by 16 months

No two-word phrases by 24 months

Doesn't understand simple words; loses words or skills; doesn't respond to name

The "wait and see" trap

Understanding (receptive language) matters more than talking. A child who understands well often catches up; one who doesn't may need support sooner.

What you can do now

Narrate your day, pause and wait expectantly, model single words

Read together daily and cut back on background screens

Parent tip: Start small. Pick one idea that fits your family, practice it consistently, and build from there.