

ASK P&C

MY 18-MONTH-OLD, Max, has a handful of words, but the other toddlers at play group are talking up a storm. He's frustrated about not being understood, and I'm becoming concerned that something may be wrong. What should I do?

—Helen G., Topeka, KS

CHILDREN typically have between 10 and 50 words by 18 months. But don't worry yet—there is a wide range of normal. To help Max, start by listening closely to see how many words he truly has—he could have more than you think, but some may be mispronounced, truncated, or misapplied. Also listen to how many sounds he has. A variety of sounds (ga, teh, doh) is a prelude to a variety of words, and he could be on the cusp of expanding his vocabulary. When it comes to communicating, you might try something novel—learn and share with him a few American Sign Language signs to express himself while his words develop. At this age, he can pick signs up very quickly, and signing can actually promote speaking as well. Many toddlers mispronounce words. With signs, you can understand Max's request while reinforcing correct pronunciation. Check out the activity guides, handbooks, and more at signingsmart.com.

Developmental psychology expert Michelle Anthony answers your questions about your child's social, emotional, and behavioral development at home and in school. **THIS MONTH:** baby talk troubles, a competitive sibling, and a parent bored with child's play.



MY 5-YEAR-OLD son is obsessed with being first and fastest. It drives me crazy, and it really upsets his 7-year-old sister. I try to tell her it's just who he is and not to let it get under her skin, but that doesn't seem to be working. Do you have any ideas?

—Corey W., Twin Falls, ID

WE ALL have things that are important to us, no matter how old we are; things that we feel reflect who we are (or want to be) inside. For your son, it's likely being fast.

Think about what really matters to your daughter and see if you can help her understand that parallel part of herself and what it feels like to want to express it with pride. That will give her some perspective. At the same time, it's important to honor her feelings about her brother's actions.

Emphasize to your son that while you understand his desires, making comparisons to his siblings or friends can be hurtful. Help him express his inner

desire in a more socially appropriate and welcoming way: Suggest he announce he is faster than a rocket, or an airplane, or a race car. So instead of saying, "I beat you!" he can say, "I'm faster than a rocket!"

MY 3-YEAR-OLD loves cars and trucks with a passion. He always wants me to play cars with him, but only the same games in the

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exact same ways. I'm bored! I suggest other games or puzzles, but its cars, cars, cars. What do I do?

—Sarah T., Polson, MT

WELCOME TO the age of repetition! From reading to eating to playing, children this age fall back on familiar favorites, and trying to divert their interests can cause a meltdown. Despite how annoying it can be to you, doing the same things over and over allows your child a sense of mastery and introduces him to social roles ("You do this; I do that"). This is also the age of increasing initiative. Your child wants to assert control, so he enjoys engaging you in play he designed.

But your child will also benefit from stretching his skill base while still working within a favorite framework. Try turning the cars into puppets with wheels. Dunk them in a bin of water and announce that they're submarines. This will make it easier for your child to venture past his comfort level, with his familiar friends along for the ride! **P&C**



Have a question you'd like P&C to answer? E-mail it to AskPC@scholastic.com.