Summary
Gifted Children often identified as being gifted when they begin to talk much *earlier* than their peers. However, there is lesser known group of gifted children who display their intelligence in every other way apart from speech. These children are gifted late talkers. This factsheet covers the characteristics that these children share and offers support and advice to parents of gifted late talkers.

Introduction
Around 15% of 2 year olds are developmentally delayed with their speech ability. Of that 15%, a small minority are Gifted Late Talkers. These children are displaying a Specific Language Impairment and this is the term that health professionals and speech therapists will use to describe this form of speech delay. These children have an excellent *understanding* of speech, but have difficulty *expressing* themselves using language. Very little is known about exactly *why* these bright children experience speech delay. Gifted Late Talkers are essentially developing asynchronously. Their intellectual development is much more advanced than their chronological age and speech ability. Their speech can take years to develop; most do not speak intelligibly until they are 3.5 or much older (can be up to the age of around 6-7).

Characteristics of Gifted Late Talkers

- Boys are 3 times as likely as girls to have speech delay
- Strong family history of late talking
- Exceptional memory
- Excellent understanding
- Communicate well using other means
- Mischievous
- Long concentration span when engaged in activities that interest them
- Personal quirks
- Independent
- Like music (although not always the usual nursery rhymes- they tend to prefer more complex sounds)
- Interested in mechanics/engineering and how everything works
- Extremely curious
- Affectionate
- Very good at puzzles
- Highly active, enjoys physical play and time outdoors
- May have problems sleeping and ‘switching off’
- Pick up on conversations and responds accordingly (non-verbally) from a very early age
- Late to potty train
Only What Interests Them

Einstein, the most famous late talking genius:

‘Ignored whatever bored him, making no attempt to master it; but if something caught his interest, he embraced it with the purposeful concentration of a watchmaker.’

Similarly, gifted late talking children are often unwilling to participate in any obvious attempts to practice speech as it bores and frustrates them. These same children surprise their parents when they are absorbed in a task that interests them for much longer than their peers are able to concentrate. The key to engaging gifted late talkers into practicing speech is to get involved in what interests them. These children are often quirky and obsessed with particular things. Playing with your child whilst they are absorbed in what fascinates them is an ideal time to incorporate conversation; to begin with, this will be one-sided!

Keen Observers

These children are excellent observers of day to day life. They are absorbing and evaluating their surroundings and those around them. One school of thought regarding the reason why gifted children talk late is the belief that these children are absorbing and processing far more than they are physically able to communicate via speech.

Gifted late talkers are highly intelligent and very capable; consequently, they are able to amuse themselves quite well without the need to participate in ‘baby play’ or ‘baby talk’. What interests them is not necessarily what most toddlers find fascinating. Many late talking gifted children tend to enjoy ‘grown up toys’ such as household appliances, computers or mobile phones!

Speech Therapy and Gifted Children

It is very common for gifted late talkers to be non-compliant during speech therapy sessions as they are very aware of why they have been brought there and the characteristic gifted personality trait of stubbornness becomes more apparent than ever. During a speech therapy session, it is not uncommon for the gifted child to categorically refuse to participate in any attempts made by the therapist to engage the child and even initially bond with them! It is a good idea to speak to the speech therapist prior to a therapy session and tell them about your gifted child; in particular what they are interested in and what makes them happy. Rather than the brightly coloured toys strategically placed on the floor, the gifted late talker may instead be fascinated by the stapler or phone on the therapist’s desk! In which case, it may work best for the therapist to initially bond with your child by sharing his/her interest and build up trust. Once this rapport has been established, it is far easier to follow speech therapy exercises (although they still may require tweaking to suit the gifted child’s abilities and interests or your child could again refuse to participate).

Practical Speech Therapy Strategies to Help your Child Develop Speech:

- OWLing- Observe, Wait, Listen to what your child is saying
- MMA- Match, Model and Add More language
- Share the Moment- get down to your child’s level and mimic their actions. Use this time participate in their chosen form of communication, acknowledge their methods and use of communication and build up experiences and practice from there.
How Else Can Parents Help?

Play

Studies have shown that children make good progress with speech when they are able to see their parent’s faces and read their expressions. It is essential that the child is engaged and challenged, but at the same time is happy and secure. As with any activity for gifted children, it is important to consider what interests your child and then try to incorporate speech into that particular activity. A running commentary by a parent whilst your child is engaged in a task, including plenty of encouragement and high praise works well without being too obvious an attempt at cajoling a resistant child into talking. Quick responses to any sounds made by your will also encourage your child to experiment with making more complex sounds eventually.

Although it is impossible to be absolutely certain what goes through the minds of these gifted late talkers, judging from their ingenuity in other areas and their incredible memory, it is easy to conclude that they are capable of complex and analytical thought patterns. Such children require varied and increased amounts of activities in comparison to other children their age.

Perfectionism and Speech Delay

As ‘gifted’ children, this group of late talkers are highly prone to perfectionism. A perfectionist late talker can be easily put off imperfect attempts at speech and may even categorically refuse to participate in speech therapy as needing therapy is an admission that they are ‘imperfect’ and need help to do something that other children can do with apparent ease. Gifted perfectionists tend to place an enormous amount of pressure on themselves to achieve the impossible. In the case of Gifted Late Talking Perfectionists, these children are facing the enormous pressure of trying to communicate highly intelligent thought and observations within the restrictions of being a 2/3 year old!

To help late talker with a perfectionist streak requires a subtle approach by parents. Parents who desperately wish for their children to start speaking ‘normally’ may inadvertently thwart their child’s initial attempts by being overly enthusiastic. Do pay close attention to what your child is looking at when they are making a sound as this may well be their attempt at naming an object, and do resist the temptation to put words into their mouths before they have made a sound as this will put a gifted late talker off talking.

It is advised that parents do not attempt to correct the pronunciation of what little words their child does attempt. At this stage, it is important to encourage your child to make as many sounds as possible and not to worry about ‘perfect’ speech. For example if your child says ‘Dooda’ instead of ‘Water’ or ‘Baba’ instead of ‘Spider’, answer or respond to their attempt at speaking and talk about the topic, but do not make them feel as though they have said the wrong word.

Patience is Key!

Patience is essential to parenting a gifted late talker, as is a strong belief in your child’s abilities and intelligence. Your child is unique and cannot and should not be pigeon-holed into set parameters. Please do not be discouraged that they have not reached their milestone in talking when they should. Avoid comparisons to other children who are speaking fluently and clearly from an early
Instead, encourage your child’s interests and stay positive in order to avoid your child picking up on any anxieties you may have regarding their speech delay.

This group of late talking gifted children will talk when and where they are ready and not when it suits those around them! There are no physical or intellectual barriers to speech for this group of children. The only thing holding them back is a developmental delay which will improve with time, encouragement and patience.

For further advice and support, you may wish to book a Telephone Consultation with an NAGC Education Consultant. Parents of Gifted Late Talkers have found this service invaluable as NAGC is often the only place where someone really understands these fascinating and complex children.

Further Information Books can be ordered from our website shop: www.nagcbritain.org.uk/shop.php

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<th>P05 Inspiring Your Young Gifted Child</th>
<th>NAGC Fact Sheet with ideas for activities to share with your young gifted child</th>
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<td><a href="http://www.nagcbritain.org.uk/parents.php?id=92">www.nagcbritain.org.uk/parents.php?id=92</a></td>
<td>NAGC Fact Sheet with further information on Perfectionism. Much of the advice is for older children; however it is still useful advice for most parents of gifted children.</td>
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<th>P50 Perfectionism in Gifted Children-Overcoming the Fear of Failure</th>
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| www.teachmetotalk.com (American website of a Speech and Language Therapist with useful advice, podcasts and DVDs) |

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<th>The Einstein Syndrome: Bright Children Who Talk Late</th>
<th>A book by Thomas Sowell</th>
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<td>Childhood Speech, Language, and Listening Problems</td>
<td>A book by Patricia McAleer Hamaguchi</td>
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<td>Nurtureshock: Why everything we think about raising our children is wrong</td>
<td>A book by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman. (Please see chapter 10 ‘Why Hannah Talks and Alyssa Doesn’t for an excellent summary of various studies on developmental speech delay)</td>
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<td>The Late Talker: What to Do If Your Child Isn't Talking Yet</td>
<td>A book by Marilyn C. Agin, Lisa F. Geng, and Malcolm J. Nicholl</td>
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<tr>
<td>It Takes Two To Talk: A Practical Guide For Parents of Children With Language Delays</td>
<td>A book by Jan Pepper and Elaine Weitzman</td>
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