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Language Delays Seen in Kids in Institutions beyond Age 2

The earlier they are placed in foster care the better, study suggests

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(*this news item will not be available after 09/15/2011)

By Robert Preidt

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Photo: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

FRIDAY, June 17 (HealthDay News) -- Foster care boosts language development in young children who lived in institutions, new study findings show.

Researchers looked at more than 100 children who had lived in institutions in Romania. About half of the children were placed in foster homes when they were about 22 months old, while the other half continued living in institutions. These two groups were compared to about 60 young children who lived in the same community with their biological parents.

Children from institutions who were placed in foster care before they were 2 had greater language skills by the time they were 3½ years old than those who remained in institutions, according to the study in the current issue of the journal *Child Development*.

The researchers also found that the language skills of children who were placed in foster care before they were 15 months old were similar to those of children raised by their biological parents. But children who were placed in foster care after they were 2 years old had the same major language delays as those who remained in institutions.

"This shows that not only is the change to high-quality foster care beneficial for these children, but the timing of the change appears to be important," lead author Jennifer Windsor, a professor of speech-language-hearing sciences at the University of Minnesota, said in a news release from the Society of Research in Child Development.

The findings underline the importance of early efforts to help young children develop language, and also offer insight for American parents who adopt babies from other nations.

"Many infants and toddlers who are adopted from other countries and come to the United States develop language quickly," Windsor said. "However, older children who have been living in poor care environments may be at high risk for language delays."

SOURCE: Society of Research in Child Development, news release, June 17, 2011

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