



Health and education professionals passionate about brain science,
learning and child development

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Speech and Language Developmental Milestones

Ages 0 - 5

Between 0 and 1 years of age...

Even though your child isn't saying any words yet they are still learning about language and communication. The skills in the following table are skills that infants exhibit to show they are learning how to communicate.

Typical Age of Development	Language Precursor Skill
0-3 Months	<input type="checkbox"/> Attends to noise/speech <input type="checkbox"/> Looks at face when spoken to <input type="checkbox"/> Shows differential vocalization for pleasure or displeasure
3-6 Months	<input type="checkbox"/> Locates sounds made at side, turn to voice <input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes own name <input type="checkbox"/> Maintains eye contact <input type="checkbox"/> Reaches for objects <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipates feeding <input type="checkbox"/> Mouths objects for exploration <input type="checkbox"/> Bangs objects in play <input type="checkbox"/> Follows (with looking) a moving object <input type="checkbox"/> Initiates vocalization, reach or eye gaze <input type="checkbox"/> Protests when preferred toy is removed <input type="checkbox"/> Takes turns vocalizing, quiets to voice
6-9 Months	<input type="checkbox"/> Imitates actions on objects <input type="checkbox"/> Attempts to imitate familiar gestures <input type="checkbox"/> Imitates non-speech sounds <input type="checkbox"/> Uses cause effect toys <input type="checkbox"/> Looks toward familiar people/ pets when named <input type="checkbox"/> Attends to music/singing <input type="checkbox"/> Responds to reprimand tone (stops action) <input type="checkbox"/> Explores objects without mouthing or banging
9-12 months	<input type="checkbox"/> Moves themselves or objects to get a toy <input type="checkbox"/> Uses gestures to interact in routine <input type="checkbox"/> Waves "hello" and "goodbye" <input type="checkbox"/> Extends arm to show object <input type="checkbox"/> Points to objects to indicate awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Imitates appropriate play actions with an object <input type="checkbox"/> Gives object over on "ta" with outstretched hand <input type="checkbox"/> Follows simple action requests – "give to me" <input type="checkbox"/> Imitates consonant vowel combinations – moo, baa <input type="checkbox"/> Starts to say "mama" and "dada" <input type="checkbox"/> Attempts to imitate familiar words <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipates next action in familiar play activity

Between 1 and 2 years of age...

Your child should be beginning to express themselves with single words along with gestures.

Phonology (sounds in words)

By 2 years of age, a child should be approximately 75% intelligible to unfamiliar listeners – that is, their speech should be understood by people outside of the family 75% of the time.

Developing sounds (acquired between 1 ½ - 2 ½ years of age)	m, p, b, w, n, t, d
Sounds not expected to be produced correctly	h, k, g, f, s, v, z, l, y, sh, ch, j, r, th

Receptive Language (what is understood)

- Can bring an object from another room when requested
- Recognises and can point to many common objects, or pictures of objects, when they are named
- Recognizes names of large body parts (hair, mouth, ears, hands, etc)
- By 18 months, can understand simple questions and follow two related instructions with an object (eg. "get the ball and give it to mummy").
- By 18 months, can select 2 objects from a group of familiar objects (eg. "get the ball and the block").

Expressive Language (what is said)

- Begins to use single words to express him/herself. Has a vocabulary of at least 10-20 words by 18 months of age.
- By 16 months, most communication is made up of some true words along with gestures.
- At around 18 months, imitates some 2-word and 3-word sentences frequently heard.
- At around 18 months, imitates environmental sounds (motors, animals, etc) during play.
- By 2 years, uses at least 50 different words independently

Warning Signs

- Your child is reluctant to speak
- Your child does not understand the concepts listed under *Receptive Language* above.
- Your child does not seem to be saying new words each week.

Between 2 and 3 years of age...

Phonology (sounds in words)

Sounds expected to be produced without error	m – as in my p – as in pat b – as in bye w – as in we	t – as in toy d – as in do n – as in no
Developing sounds	k – as in can g – as in go	h – as in hat ng – as in sing
Sounds not expected to be produced correctly	y – as in yes f – as in if l – as in lay sh – as in she ch – as in chip j – as in jar s – as in yes	z – as in zoo r – as in red v – as in have th – as in this th – as in thing

75% of speech should be easily understood by people not familiar with your child

Receptive Language (what is understood)

- ◆ Carries out two instructions (eg. pick up the bottle – give it to me)
- ◆ Understands “do you want ___” question by answering yes/no
- ◆ Beginning to understand two main words in an instruction (eg. show me teddy's foot)
- ◆ Identifies body parts by pointing at them when requested to do so
- ◆ Understands simple time concepts, eg. “last night,” “tomorrow”
- ◆ Understands “big” and “little”
- ◆ Understands “in” and “on” and can carry out simple instructions using these words

Expressive Language (what is said)

- ◆ Vocabulary of at least 100 words and uses 2 word sentences at age 2
- ◆ Uses 3 word sentences by 2 ½ years
- ◆ Vocabulary of around 500 words and uses 5-6 word sentences by 3 years
- ◆ Knows animal noises
- ◆ Will name pictures of common objects
- ◆ Requests objects and actions
- ◆ Answers “where” questions

Warning Signs

- ◆ Your child's speech is difficult for you or others to understand
- ◆ Your child is reluctant to speak
- ◆ Your child has a small number of words that they are able to produce
- ◆ Your child does not understand 2 part instructions
- ◆ Your child does not understand any of the terms mentioned in the "Receptive Language" section above.

Between 3 and 4 years of age...

Phonology (sounds in words)

75% of speech should be easily understood by people not familiar with your child

Sounds expected to be produced without error	m – as in my p – as in pat b – as in bye w – as in we t – as in toy d – as in do	n – as in no ng – as in sing y – as in yes k – can g – as in go
Developing sounds	f – as in if	
Sounds not expected to be produced correctly	l – as in lay sh – as in she ch – as in chip j – as in jar s – as in yes	z – as in zoo r – as in red v – as in have th – as in this th – as in thing

Receptive Language (what is understood)

- ◆ Understanding of basic colour words.
- ◆ Understanding words for basic shapes (circle, square, triangle)
- ◆ Understand instructions containing 2 key words (e.g. touch the ball)
- ◆ Understand 2 related instructions – e.g. "close the book and give it to me"
- ◆ Understand questions about a picture story e.g. "Where did the bunny go?"
- ◆ Understanding of basic location words (on, in, under)
- ◆ Understanding of "why", "what" and "who" questions
- ◆ Understanding of basic size words (big, small)

Expressive Language (what is said)

- ◆ Vocabulary of 1000 words
- ◆ Begins to use “why”, “when” and “how” questions
- ◆ Begins to use of basic size words (big, small)
- ◆ Produces sentences of at least 3 or 4 words in length
- ◆ Emergence of the use of “and” and “because” to join sentences
- ◆ Correct use of pronouns “I”, “she”, “he”, “her”, “him”, “his”, “hers”
- ◆ Incorrect uses of past tense (e.g. “went” becomes “wented”, and “fell” becomes “falled”) should disappear by 3 ½.

Warning Signs

- ◆ Your child's speech is difficult for you or others to understand
- ◆ Your child is reluctant to speak to you or others
- ◆ Your child has a small number of words that they are able to produce
- ◆ Your child does not understand 2 part instructions
- ◆ Your child does not understand any of the terms mentioned in the “Receptive Language” section above.

Between 4 and 5 years of age...

Phonology (sounds in words)

All speech should be easily understood by people not familiar with your child

Sounds expected to be produced without error	m – as in my p – as in pat b – as in bye w – as in we t – as in toy d – as in do n – as in no ng – as in sing	y – as in yes k – as in can g – as in go l – as in lay f – as in if sh – as in she ch – as in chip
Developing sounds	j – as in jar s – as in yes	z – as in zoo
Sounds not expected to be produced correctly	r – as in red v – as in have	th – as in this th – as in thing

Receptive Language (what is understood)

- ◆ Understands 3 related instructions such as "get your crayons, make a picture and give it to mum"
- ◆ Understands "where", "what", "when", "who", "why" and "how" questions
- ◆ Understands words for basic shapes (circle, square, triangle)
- ◆ Understands basic size words (big, small)
- ◆ Understands words pertaining to order – first, third, before
- ◆ Identifies things that are different
- ◆ Points to all major body parts...head, arm, thumb, hand, knee, heel, chin, eyebrow, little finger, elbow, wrist, ankle, etc.
- ◆ Sorts objects into broad categories (e.g. animals, food etc.)
- ◆ Understands spatial concepts such as "behind," "next to"

Expressive Language (what is said)

- ◆ Has a vocabulary of 1500 words
- ◆ Asks "when" and "how" questions
- ◆ Uses basic size words (big, small)
- ◆ Uses "and" and "because" to join sentences
- ◆ Produces sentences of at least 5 words in length
- ◆ Uses "if", "so", "when" and "because" to join sentences
- ◆ Describes why two things are not the same
- ◆ Counts to at least 4
- ◆ Describes simple every-day sequences in order (e.g. what happens at night time – have a bath, brush your teeth, go to bed)
- ◆ Lists items that belong in a category – e.g. animals, food

Early Literacy Skills

- ◆ Has some knowledge of letter names and sounds
- ◆ Has knowledge of numbers and counting
- ◆ Is able to identify words that rhyme
- ◆ Has an emerging ability to break words down into syllables or beats

Warning Signs

- ◆ Your child does not use complete sentences or uses very short sentences
- ◆ Your child stutters
- ◆ Your child does not seem to be able to follow directions
- ◆ Your child is not easily understood by people not familiar with them
- ◆ Your child does not know simple colours or shapes
- ◆ Your child often uses terms such as "this", "it" and "that" rather than names of objects.

