



Speech and



Language

Development

Speech and language skills are very important. They allow us to communicate with other people to express our needs, wants and ideas; they aid in the formation of friendships and relationships; and, they form the basis of our reading and writing skills.

This information brochure provides general information about the natural development of speech and language skills, and is intended to be used as a guide by parents to monitor the progression of their child's abilities.

If you are concerned about your child's speech and language development, please talk to your child's school—they will be able to tell you about services available for your child.



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SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS

3—6 Months

- Babbling
- Baby notices that the noises that they make are related to the way they move their mouth, so they start experimenting with making **sound.**

6—8 Months

- Variegated babbling
- Baby can combine sounds in their babbling e.g. Da-da-da-, ma-da-ma-da.
- Baby develops front sounds first then back sounds
- Sounds that the baby makes are specific to their own language
- Sounds the baby makes sound like conversation

8—12 Months

- Echolalia
- First words might be heard in this age bracket—usually common words are copied, such as “Mumma”, “Dadda”, etc.

1—1 1/2 Years

- Can understand more than 50 words
- Says words while looking at the object, i.e. “ball”, while playing with the ball
- Attaches meaning to the words they say
- Can begin to follow simple 1 step instructions

1 1/2—2 Years

- Should be able to say 8-50 words
- Child experiences more control over their environment, i.e. says “Daddy” expecting daddy to come

2—2 1/2 Years

- Should be able to say at least 50 words
- Puts two words together to form sentences, i.e. “Daddy ball”, “Daddy throw”, “Throw ball” (All mean “Daddy throw the ball”)

2 1/2—3 Years

- Understands 500-1000 words
- Asks “What’s this?” a lot
- Learns 10-20 new words per day

3 to 4 Years

Speech

- Strangers can understand most of what they say.
- They may still make error with some sounds (like; l, z, sh, ch, j, r, v, th) and long words.

Understanding

- They can understand instructions with 2 and 3 steps.
- They can understand simple who, what, where questions.
- They attempt to answer “why” and “how” questions but may not always get them right.
- They understand the order of daily routines.

Social Skills

- They use language for asking questions, telling you how they feel, telling people what to do and commenting on what is happening around them.
- They can carry on long conversations.
- They can use polite words, please, thank-you and excuse me.

Vocabulary

- They can say about 1000 words.
- They know common colours and shapes.
- They can sort pictures into categories they belong in (like food, animals, etc.)
- They can use position words like; behind, on, under, in front.
- They can understand simple time concepts like; soon, tonight, tomorrow, in a few minutes.

Sentence Structure

- They speak in sentences of 4 words.
- They use and, then, because to link ideas when they are talking.

Stories

- They can tell simple stories with pictures/books.
- They can tell a story about a topic using simple sentences (no temporal order or connectors).
- By 4 years begins to connect sentences.

Sounds and letters

- They enjoy rhyming and nursery rhymes.
- They can recognise some letters if taught.
- They may be able to write their name.

4 to 5 Years

Speech

- They can say most sounds correctly when they talk. Their speech is easy to understand.
- They may still have difficulty with r, v and th sounds and long words like hospital.

Understanding

- They can answer who, what, where and why questions.
- They can follow 3 unrelated directions.
- They can generally follow most instructions without help.
- They can understand instructions containing 'if', 'because' and 'when'.
- They can understand first, second, etc.
- They can understand instructions that contain negatives, for example 'point to the ones that are not orange.

Social Skills

- They can adapt their language style depending on who they are talking to, they talk differently to babies than adults.
- They begin to use indirect speech, for example saying 'Gee it's cold in here', instead of 'Can you close the door?'
- They can generally stay on topic in conversation.

Vocabulary

- They have basic understanding of concepts related to number, size, weight, colours, textures, distance, position.
- Can define words in terms of what they do or are used for. For example 'a car is used for driving'.
- They can easily learn and remember new words and then use them in their general talking.
- They begin to use descriptive language.

Sentence Structure

- They speak in sentences of 5-6 words in length.
- They speak in longer, more detailed sentences.
- They may overgeneralise past tense like; 'goed', 'runned'.
- They use and, then, because, so, when and but etc. to link ideas when they are talking.

Stories

- They can retell stories they have heard from books.
- They can link sentences by using 'and' or 'and then' (because may be emerging).
- They are beginning to use story starters e.g. 'One day.....'

Sounds and letters

- They can tell you what the first sound is in familiar words.
- They are beginning to be able to tell if words rhyme or not.
- They can clap out the syllables in words.
- They begin to understand the concept of a word.

5 to 6 Years

Speech

- They can say most sounds correctly when they talk. Their speech is easy to understand.
- They may have difficulty with r and th sounds, long words like hospital and words with 3 consonant blends e.g. splash.

Understanding

- They can easily follow instructions without further explanation.
- They can answer complex why questions that need them to make a prediction.
- They can understand *before* and *after*.

Social Skills

- They can hold a conversation and generally stay on topic.
- They can answer the telephone.
- They ask questions to get information.
- They can use tactics in disagreements. For example, they might use threats, bribes, insults, praise, commands, contradictions and promises.
- They can tell the difference between what is polite and impolite.
- They can play games with other children.

Vocabulary

- They have common opposites.
- They can define familiar words.
- They can name categories.
- Their descriptions include detail.
- They understand *many* and *few*.

Sentence Structure

- They may still overgeneralise past tense like; 'goed', 'runned'.
- They use a range of pronouns like; he, she, they, consistently and correctly.

Stories

- They can use and understand simple cause-effect relationships.
- They use a simple narrative structure. For example, their plot has beginning, problem, resolution and an end.
- They describe the characters intentions and feelings.
- They don't have much planning in their stories yet.

Sounds and letters

- They are aware that letters make sounds and they are learning to match letters with the sounds they make.
- They are beginning to be able to break short words into their sounds.
- They are beginning to be able to tell you the first, middle and last sounds in words.
- They can tell you words that start with a particular sound.
- They can tell you words that rhyme.
- They understand how books work and that written words mean something.
- They like to try and use and tell jokes.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE LATER YEARS

6—7 Years

- Can say 300+ words
- Can segment CVC words (i.e. Consonant + Vowel + Consonant words) such as “cat” - “C-A-T”
- Can define words by their function (i.e. “A car is something that you drive”
- Can use irregular plurals (i.e. mice, ran, drank)
- Can understand 24000 words

7—8 Years

- Spelling and reading skills should be strongly developing
- Children can think about how sounds link to letters, and are able to manipulate sounds in words, for example—delete initial sounds from blends, i.e. “stop” without “s” makes “top”; sounds out words that contain long vowels, blends and more than one syllable
- Understanding of language has increased— they will now understand a wide variety of words and figurative language, such as idioms (e.g. “it’s raining cats and dogs”) and jokes

Statewide Speech
& Language Team
(South-West)



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