

Guidelines for speech and language development



These are the usual stages of speech and language development for most children. Each child is unique, and speech may develop at different rates for each child.

Age	What your child understands	What your child says	How your child's speech sounds
Birth to 3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Startles or cries from loud sounds Wakes up from loud sounds Makes eye contact when you talk to them Stops crying when they hear your voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes cooing sounds Smiles when you talk to them Uses different cries for pain, hunger and other needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coos with vowel sounds (aaa, ooo)
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turns toward sounds like music Responds to name Responds to "no" Can calm themselves when they are upset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows needs with sounds or gestures Yells, growls, squeals and blows/spits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeats sounds like (ma ma ma, bye bye bye) Makes sounds when they are alone
9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds to their name Follows simple commands and actions (give me the toy, put that down) Understands names of some simple objects (cup, shoe, juice) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waves bye-bye Shakes head "no" Plays "pat-a-cake" and "peek-a-boo" Makes sounds to get your attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Speaks" in series of different syllables (ba ba ma ma) Copies many different sounds
12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follows simple, 1 part instructions (put the block in cup) Points to pictures in books when named 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a few words the right way (mama, dada, bye bye) "Talks" by babbling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copies sounds of things at home or outside (dog, engine)

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Guidelines for speech and language development, continued

Age	What your child understands	What your child says	How your child's speech sounds
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands names of many objects • Follows 2 part instructions • Points to 1 to 4 body parts when named • Understands about 250 words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Says 10 to 50 words • Uses some 2 word phrases (want juice, all gone) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses some consonants (p, b, m, w, h) most often at the start of words
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Points to simple pictures when named (ball, dog) • Points to 5 body parts when named • Follows more 2 part instructions • Knows the names of most common pictures and objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Says 50 to 100 words • Uses 2 word phrases • Has a word for almost everything • Combines nouns and verbs (mommy eat) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and others understand speech about half the time • Uses consonants like p, b, m, n, w, h
2 ½ years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands pictures of actions • Knows objects by what they do (What do we use to comb our hair?) • Understands about 500 words • Attends to book reading with caregiver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Says 50 to 250 words • Uses 3 word phrases • Is learning endings to words (s, ing) • Uses is, the, a • Repeats and delays words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses p, b, m, n, h, w • Does not always pronounce sounds the right way • Skips sounds in the middle and at the end of words
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follows 3 part instructions • Understands who, what, where • Understands some descriptive words (big, little) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns words quickly • Uses 3 and 4 word sentences • Uses he, she, they • Uses past tense (went, was) • Asks questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and others understand most of their speech • Makes sounds like f, k, g, t, d, ng

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Guidelines for speech and language development, continued

Age	What your child understands	What your child says	How your child's speech sounds
3 years (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands longer sentences • Understands about 800 words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeats often 	
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follows 4 part instructions • Knows size and color to describe objects • Understands physical needs (What do you do when you are hungry?) • Understands about 1,200 to 2,000 words • Knows 1 to 3 colors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Says 800 to 1,500 words • Uses 4 to 5 word sentences • Uses words for feelings • Answers many types of questions • Counts 4 objects • Counts 1 to 10 • Speaks with less effort • Repeats, stops and makes faces when talking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and others understand speech almost all the time
5 years and older	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands timing like first, then, last • Follows multi-step instructions • Answers questions about a story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly uses the right forms of verbs to talk about the past and future • Tells a short story with right order of events • Joins in back-and-forth conversation with peers and caregivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has most sounds by 7 years of age • May struggle with sounds like r, th

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Guidelines for speech and language development, continued

Where can I get help?

Talk with your child's doctor if you have concerns about your child's speech. You may also call the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology department at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

Therapist

Date

Phone number

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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