

Speech and Language Developmental Milestones

Age-related Stages of Language Acquisition for Children 0-5 Years.

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The first three years of life, when the brain is developing and maturing, is the most intensive period for acquiring speech and language skills. The remaining two years are important for preparing new entrants with the range of language skills necessary to manage schooling. Children vary in their development but do, however, follow a natural progression or timetable for mastering the skills of language. A checklist of milestones for the normal development of speech and language skills in children from birth to five years of age is shown below. These milestones are intended to help doctors and other health professionals determine if a child is on track or if he or she may need extra help.

Page One: Zero to 36 Months

	Speech Sounds	Sentence Length	Hearing & Comprehension	Grasp of Language Concepts
Birth to 5 months	Vocalises pleasure & displeasure (laughter, crying). Different cries for different needs.		Reacts to loud sounds. Quietens when spoken to. Pays attention to music.	Makes noise when talked to.
6 to 11 months	Babbles (e.g. 'ba-ba-ba', 'up-up'). Says most vowels and several consonants (e.g. 'p, b, m, d'). Makes gurgling or cooing sounds, both when left alone and when playing with you.	Says first his or her first word.	Beginning to respond to requests (e.g. 'come here', 'want more?'). Understands 'no'. Turns and looks in the direction of sounds. Listens when spoken to. Recognises words for common items like 'cup', 'shoe', 'book'.	Communicates with actions or gestures (e.g. waving, holding arms to be picked up). Uses speech or non-crying sounds to get and keep attention. Tries to copy sounds/actions. Shakes head yes/no to some questions. Early turn-taking during play.
12 to 17 months	Experiments with different sounds.	Four to 20 words.	Tries to imitate simple words. Answers simple questions non-verbally.	Looks for objects that are out of sight (e.g. the 'peek-a-boo' game). Initiates interactions.
18 to 23 months	Correctly pronounces vowels and many consonants (e.g. n, m, p, h, w, b, h) especially in the beginning of syllables. Often unclear. Makes animal sounds such as 'moo' or 'baa'.	50 words at 18 months, growing towards 200 by 23 months. Combining words e.g. 'more milk', 'no juice', 'mummy book'. Says 'no'.	Understands simple commands. Points to about five body parts when asked. Follows simple commands and understands simple questions (e.g. 'roll the ball', 'kiss the baby', 'where is your shoe?'). Points to pictures in a book when named.	Begins to use pronouns such as 'mine'. Listens to simple stories, songs and rhymes. Asks for common foods by name. Uses some one/two word questions (e.g. 'Where kitty?', 'Go bye-bye?', 'What's that?')
24 to 36 months	In addition to the above, uses 'k, g, f, t, d, y' sounds. Speech is becoming more accurate, but may still leave off end sounds. Strangers may not understand much of what is said.	Uses 250 to 900 words. All 'real' words now, no babbling. Uses three word sentences; may not be grammatically correct yet.	Responds to simple, two-part instructions such as 'Run fast please!' Understands simple opposites (e.g. up/down). Answers simple questions; starting to ask questions. Uses the correct inflection. Talks about things in the past.	Imitates simple actions. Knows pronouns such as 'you,' 'me,' 'her', 'I', 'he'. Knows descriptive words such as 'big', 'happy', 'hot'. Begins to use plurals such as 'shoes' and regular past tense verbs such as 'jump <u>ed</u> '. Can tell simple stories.



Page Two: 36 Months to Five years

	Speech Sounds	Sentence Length	Hearing & Comprehension	Grasp of Language Concepts
3 to 4 years	Uses most speech sounds but may distort some of the more difficult sounds (e.g. l, r, s, z, sh, ch, v).	1,000 words by 3 years, growing to 1,600 by 4 years.	Answers simple who, what, where, why, questions, such as 'What do you do when you are hungry?'	Groups objects such as food, clothes, etc. Identifies colours. Able to describe the use of objects such as 'fork,' 'car,' etc.
	Uses consonants in the beginning, middle, and ends of words - some of the more difficult consonants may be distorted, but attempts to say them.	The number of words are noticeably increasing, on a regular basis.	Copies sentences. Hears when you call from another room. Hears t.v./radio at the same loudness level as other family members.	Has fun with language - enjoys poems and recognises language absurdities such as, 'Is that an elephant on your head?'
	Strangers are able to understand much of what is said.	Constructs sentences of 4-5 words. Talks with ease, without repeating syllables or words.	Listens attentively to short stories and books. Recognises common everyday sounds. Identifies some objects by use, e.g. 'Which one do we write with?'	Expresses ideas and feelings rather than just talking about the world around him/ her. Starting to use correct grammar. Asks 'why, where, what, how' questions. Carries on long conversations.
4 to 5 years	Speech is understandable but makes mistakes pronouncing long or complex words such as 'hippopotamus'.	1,500 to 2,200 words.	Understands complex questions.	Understands spatial concepts such as 'behind,' 'next to'.
	No longer lisp (i.e. tongue poking between teeth for 's' and 'z' sounds).	Gives lots of details, e.g. 'the biggest peach is mine'.	Pays attention to a short story and answers simple questions about them.	Describes how to do things such as painting a picture. Defines words.
	May have errors with blends, 'th', and 'r' sounds.	Grammar is the same as an adult's.	Understands most of what is said at home and in school/Kindergarten. Understands rhyme.	Lists items that belong in a category e.g. animals, vehicles. Answers 'why' questions. Tells stories that stick to topic. Communicates easily with other children and adults.
5 years (new entrant)	Most blends are now accurate, particularly: - 'sp, st, sk, sm, sn,' - 'br, dr, tr, kr,' - 'gl, kl, pl, bl, sl'	Uses more than 2,000 words. Sentences are 8+ words in length and constructed correctly.	Carries out a series of three directions. Responds to 3-part or 4-part instructions. Understands the order of daily routines.	Understands time sequences (first, second, third, etc.). Engages in conversation. Uses imagination to create stories; describes objects. Tries to use new words.

