

Stages of Speech and Language Development

Up to 3 months



Listening and attention

- Turns towards a familiar sound
- Startled by loud noises

Understanding

- Recognises parent's voice
- Often calmed by familiar friendly voice, e.g. parent's

Speech sounds and talk

- Frequently cries especially when unhappy or uncomfortable
- Makes vocal sounds, e.g. cooing, gurgling

Social skills

- Gazes at faces and copies facial movements, e.g. sticking out tongue!
- Makes eye contact for fairly long periods

3 – 6 months



- Watches face when someone talks

- Shows excitement at sound of approaching voices

- Makes vocal noises to get attention
- Makes sounds back when talked to
- Laughs during play
- Babbles to self

- Senses different emotions in parent's voice and may respond differently, for example, smile, quieten, laugh
- Cries in different ways to express different needs

6 – 12 months



- Locates source of voice with accuracy
- Focuses on different sounds, e.g. telephone, doorbell, clock

- Understands frequently used words such as 'all gone', 'no' and 'bye-bye'
- Stops and looks when hears own name
- Understands simple instructions when supported by gestures and context

- Uses speech sounds (babbling) to communicate with adults; says sounds like 'ba-ba, no-no, go-go'
- Stops babbling when hears familiar adult voice
- Uses gestures such as waving and pointing to help communicate
- Around 12 months begins to use single words e.g. 'mummy', 'dada', 'tete' (teddy)

- Enjoys action rhymes and songs
- Tries to copy adult speech and lip movements
- Takes 'turns' in conversations (using babble)

12 – 15 months



- Attends to music and singing
- Enjoys sound-making toys/objects

- Understands single words in context, e.g. cup, milk, daddy
- Understands more words than they can say
- Understands simple instructions, e.g. 'kiss mummy', 'give to daddy', 'stop'

- Says around 10 single words, although these may not be clear
- Reaches or points to something they want whilst making speech sounds

- Likes being with familiar adults
- Likes watching adults for short periods of time

15 – 18 months



- Listens and responds to simple information/instructions, e.g. 'Ben, put on shoes', 'Mohammed, give to daddy'

- Understands a wide range of single words and some two-word phrases, e.g. 'give me', 'shoe on'
- Recognises and points to objects and pictures in books if asked
- Gives named familiar objects to adult, e.g. coat, car, apple, book

- Still babbles but uses at least 20 single words correctly, although may not be clear
- Copies gestures and words from adults
- Constant babbling and single words used during play
- Uses intonation, pitch and changing volume when 'talking'

- Simple pretend play
- Plays alone, although likes to be near familiar adult
- Although increasingly independent, happiest when near familiar adult

18 months to 2 years



- Focuses on an activity of their own choice but finds it difficult to be directed by an adult
- Use of child's name beginning to help them to attend to what an adult says, e.g. 'Sarah, eat sandwiches', 'Ali, put coat on'

- Understanding of single words develops rapidly during this stage: anything between 200 and 500 words are known
- Understands more simple instructions, e.g. 'Get mummy's shoes', 'Get your bricks', 'Tell dad tea's ready'

- Uses up to 50 words
- Begins to put two or three words together
- Frequently asks questions, e.g. the names of people and objects (towards two years of age)
- Uses speech sounds p,b,m,w

- 'Pretend' play developing with toys, such as feeding a doll or driving a car
- Becomes frustrated when unable to make self understood – this may result in tantrums
- Follows adult body language including pointing, gesture and facial expressions

2 – 3 years



- Beginning to listen to talk with interest, but easily distracted.
- Listens to talk addressed to him/herself, but finds it difficult if prompts are not provided, e.g. use of name, 'stop and listen'

- Developing understanding of simple concepts including in/on/under, big/little
- Understands phrases like 'put teddy in the box', 'get your book, coat and bag', 'draw a big brown dog'
- Understands simple 'who' and 'what' and 'where' questions but not why
- Understands a simple story when supported with pictures

- Uses 300 words including descriptive language, time, space, function
- Links four to five words together
- May stutter or stammer when thinking what to say
- Able to use pronouns (me, him, she), plurals and prepositions (in, on, under)
- Has problems saying speech sounds: /r/w/y, f/th, s/sh/ch/dz/j

- Holds a conversation but jumps from topic to topic
- Interested in other's play and will join in
- Expresses emotions towards adults and peers using words, not just actions

3 – 4 years



- Enjoys listening to stories
- Still finds it difficult to attend to more than one thing at a time, so can't easily listen to a speaker whilst still carrying on an activity; has to switch attention between speaker and task

- Understands questions or instructions with two parts: 'get your jumper' and 'stand by the door'
- Understands 'why' questions
- Aware of time in relation to past, present and future, e.g. Today is sunny, yesterday was rainy, I wonder what the weather will be like tomorrow? (towards four years)

- Uses sentences of four to six words, e.g. 'I want to play with cars', 'What's that thingy called?'
- Uses future and past tense.
- May continue to have problems with irregular words, 'runned' for 'ran', 'swimmed' for 'swam'
- Able to remember and enjoys telling long stories or singing songs
- Has problems saying r, j, th, ch, and sh

- Understands turn-taking as well as sharing with adults and peers
- Initiates conversations
- Enjoys playing with peers
- Able to argue with adults or peers if they disagree – uses words, not just actions

4 – 5 years



- Attention is now more flexible – the child can understand spoken instructions related to a task without stopping the activity to look at the speaker

- Able to follow simple story without pictures
- Understands instructions containing sequencing words: 'first... after... last'
- Understands adjectives: soft, hard, smooth, etc
- Aware of more complex humour, laughs at jokes that are told

- Uses well formed sentences, e.g. 'I played with Ben at lunch time' but there may still be some grammatical errors
- Easily understood by adults and peers, with only a few immaturities in speech sounds, for example, 'th', 'r' and three consonant combinations 'scribble'
- Frequently asks the meaning of unfamiliar words and may use them randomly

- Chooses own friends
- Generally co-operative with playmates
- Able to plan construction and make believe play activities
- Takes turns in longer conversations
- Uses language to gain information, negotiate, discuss feelings/ideas and give opinions