

Learning to speak and listen - what to expect in the first five years



Please read the Important Notice on the reverse of this Fact Sheet.

Many parents wonder if children's language and listening skills are developing normally. While individual children develop their talking and listening skills at different rates, there is a general pattern to children's language development.

By the age of one, your baby should be able to:

- respond to familiar sounds, such as the telephone ringing, the vacuum cleaner, or the car in the driveway
- understand simple commands, such as "no"
- recognise their own name
- understand the names of familiar objects or people
- say "dad", "mumma" and a few other words
- enjoy songs, music and books
- try to make familiar sounds, such as car and animal noises

By the age of two, your toddler should be able to:

- say the names of simple body parts, such as nose or tummy
- listen to stories and say the names of pictures
- understand simple sentences, such as "where's your shoe?"
- use more than fifty words such as "no", "gone", "mine", "teddy"
- talk to themselves or their toys during play
- sing simple songs, such as "Twinkle, twinkle, little star", or "Baa baa black sheep"
- use some pronouns instead of names, such as "he", "it"
- try simple sentences, such as "milk all gone"

By the age of three, your child should be able to:

- understand how objects are used - a crayon is something to draw with
- recognise their own needs, such as hunger
- follow directions
- use three to four word sentences
- begin to use basic grammar
- enjoy telling stories and asking questions
- have favourite books and television programs
- be understood by familiar adults



By the age of four, your child should be able to:

- understand shape and colour names
- understand some "time" words, such as lunch time, today, winter
- ask who, what and why questions
- use lots of words, about 900, usually in four to five word sentences
- use correct grammar with occasional mistakes, such as "I falled down"
- use language when playing with other children
- speak clearly enough to be understood by most people

By the age of five, your child should be able to:

- understand opposites, such as high and low, wet and dry, big and little
- use sentences of about six words with correct grammar
- talk about events which are happening, have happened or might happen
- explain why something happens, such as "Mum's car stopped because the petrol ran out"
- explain the function of objects, for example, "This scrunchie keeps my hair away"
- follow three directions, for example, "Stand up, get you shoes on and wait by the door"
- say how they feel and tell you their ideas
- become interested in writing, numbers and reading things
- speak clearly enough to be understood by anyone

When to seek help

A speech pathologist is professionally trained to advise, diagnose and work with children and adults who have a communication disability. They work in a variety of settings including schools, health centres, hospitals or in private practice.

Contact a speech pathologist if you are worried about your child's speech or language, if your child sounds quite different from the ages and stages outlined above, or if your child's teacher is concerned.

Most speech pathologists belong to Speech Pathology Australia, which is the official body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability.

References

Please contact Speech Pathology Australia's National Office for the references used to create this Fact Sheet.

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