

An Introduction to Speech and Language Development



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FREE tools to maximize child development

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Two Types of Communication Skills

From birth baby begins to develop the two communication skills they will continue to build on and use throughout their life:

- Receptive communication is the ability to receive and understand a message from another person. Baby demonstrates this skill by turning their head towards your voice and responding to simple directions.
- Expressive communication is the ability to convey a message to another person through sounds, speech, signs, or writing. Crying, babbling, and using body language are examples of baby's early expressive skills.

Tips for Encouraging Speech and Language Development

- ▶ Use a high-pitched, sing-song voice. This helps get and keep your baby's attention while you talk.
- ▶ Play with sounds. Get silly while playing and make sounds that connect with what your child is doing.
- ▶ Use facial expressions and gestures to communicate the meaning of words.
- ▶ Describe your actions as you dress, feed, and bathe your child. Pairing the same words with routine activities is a great way to develop language.
- ▶ Encourage two-way communication. When your child communicates with you using sounds, words, or gestures, be sure to respond and take turns in "conversation."
- ▶ Read with your child. "Reading" can simply mean describing pictures without following the written words. Choose books with large, colorful pictures, and encourage your child to point to and name familiar objects.
- ▶ Expand your child's vocabulary by building on the words they already know. For example, if your child says "dog," you could say "Yes, that's a big dog!"
- ▶ Reword your child's phrases. If your child makes a speech or language error, respond with their phrase in the correct form. This helps them learn proper pronunciation and grammar. For example, if your child says "Doggy big," you can respond with "Yes, the doggy is big."



Pathways.org empowers parents and health professionals with FREE tools and resources to maximize a child's motor, sensory, and communication development.

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BY
3
MONTHS

- Makes eye contact
- Cries differently for different needs, e.g. hungry vs. tired
- Coos and smiles

- Turns head toward sound or voice
- Quiets or smiles in response to sound or voice
- Shows interest in faces

BY
6
MONTHS

- Begins to use consonant sounds in babbling, e.g. "da, da, da"
- Makes different kinds of sounds to express feelings
- Uses babbling to get attention

- Listens and responds when spoken to
- Reacts to sudden noises or sounds
- Notices toys that make sounds

BY
9
MONTHS

- Imitates sounds
- Uses increased variety of sounds and syllable combinations in babbling
- Participates in two-way communication

- Recognizes sound of their name
- Looks at familiar objects and people when named
- Follows some routine commands paired with gestures

BY
12
MONTHS

- Meaningfully uses "mama" or "dada"
- Imitates speech sounds
- Babbling has sounds and rhythms of speech

- Responds to "no"
- Responds to simple directions, e.g. "come here"
- Pays attention to where you are looking and pointing

BY
15
MONTHS

- May use 5-10 words
- Imitates simple words and actions
- Combines sounds and gestures

- Consistently follows simple directions
- Shows interest in pictures
- Can identify 1-2 body parts when named

BY
18
MONTHS

- Repeats words overheard in conversation
- Responds to questions
- Continues to produce speech-like babbling

- Points at familiar objects and people in pictures
- Understands "in" and "on"
- Responds to yes/no questions with head shake/nod

BY
21
MONTHS

- Uses at least 50 words
- Consistently imitates new words
- Names objects and pictures

- Understands simple pronouns (me, you, my)
- Understands new words quickly
- Identifies 3-5 body parts when named

BY
24
MONTHS

- Uses gestures and words during pretend play
- Begins to use 2-word phrases
- Uses simple pronouns (me, you, my)

- Understands action words
- Follows 2-step related directions, e.g. "Pick up your coat and bring it to me."
- Enjoys listening to stories

BY
30
MONTHS

- Consistently uses 2-3 word phrases
- Uses "in" and "on"
- At least 50% of speech is understood by caregiver

- Follows 2-step unrelated directions, e.g. "Give me the ball and go get your coat."
- Understands basic nouns and pronouns
- Understands "mine" and "yours"

BY
36
MONTHS

- Asks "what" and "where" questions
- Uses plurals, e.g. "dogs"
- Most speech is understood by caregiver

- Understands most simple sentences
- Simple understanding of concepts including color, space, time
- Understands "why" questions

*Remember to correct your child's age for prematurity.