



Typical Development of Speech and Language Skills (0-3 years old)

Newborn to 3 months

- Startles to loud sounds
- Quiets or smiles when spoken to
- Seems to recognize your voice
- Increases or decreases sucking behavior in response to sound
- Makes pleasure sounds (cooing)
- Cries differently for different needs
- Smiles when he sees you

Red flags: No sounds (cooing)/quiet baby; doesn't react to you

4 to 6 months

- Moves eyes in direction of sound
- Responds to changes in your voice
- Notices toys that make sounds
- Pays attention to music
- Babbling sounds (more speech-like); many different sounds including "p, b, m"
- Vocalizes excitement and displeasure
- Makes gurgling sounds when left alone and when playing with you

Red flags: Quiet baby—no sounds; no eye contact with you; no attention to voice or music

7 months to 12 months

- Enjoys games and peek-a-boo
- Turns and looks in direction of sounds
- Listens when spoken to
- Recognizes words for common items like "cup", "shoe", "juice"
- Begins to respond to requests ("Come here," "Want more?")
- Babbling has both long and short groups of sounds such as "tata upup bibibi"
- Uses speech or non-crying sounds to get and keep attention
- Imitates different speech sounds
- Has 1 or 2 words (bye bye, dada, mama) although they may not be clear

- Uses communicative gestures such as pointing and pulling

Red flags: Quiet baby—few vocalizations; no sound play or babbling, pointing or gesturing by 12 months; only vowels in vocalizations; does not respond to voice or sounds.

12 months to 15 months

- Maintains attention to pictures
- Understands simple directions especially with vocal or physical cues
- Uses one or more words with meaning

Red flags: No communicative gestures such as pointing or pulling; vocalizations with only vowels; no imitative skills; no response to parent's vocalizations; no response to name.

15 months to 18 months

- Says more words each month; vocabulary of 5-20 words
- Vocabulary composed mainly of nouns
- Much jargon-like speech
- Able to follow simple commands without cues ("Get your bear.")

Red flags: No single words by 16 months; no imitative skills; limited consonants in speech; no response to directions with cues.

18-21 months

- Points to a few body parts when named
- Follows simple commands and understands simple questions ("Roll the ball," "Where's your shoe?")
- Listens to simple stories, songs, and rhymes
- Points to pictures in a book when named
- Uses many different consonant sounds at beginning of words
- Expressive vocabulary of 25-50 words

Red flags: Limited variety of consonants; vowel distortions; few words, limited imitative skills.

21 months to 24 months

- Uses some 1-2 word questions ("What's that?" "Daddy?" "Bye bye?")
- Puts 2 words together ("more cookie", "no juice", "Mommy book")
- Language explosion around 18-24 months; vocabulary of 150-300 words by 24 months

Red flags: Limited spoken vocabulary; limited variety of consonants; distortions of vowels or sounds; little response to name, directions, questions.

24 months to 36 months

- Understands differences in meanings of words (in/out, go/stop, up/down)
- Follows two requests ("Get the book and put it on the table")
- Has a word for almost everything
- Uses 2-3 words to talk about and ask for things
- Speech is understood by familiar listeners most of the time
- Often asks for or directs attention to objects by naming them

Red flags: No language explosion by 30 months; unintelligible speech; small vocabulary; no simple 2-word combinations by 27 months.

36 months

- Hears you when you call from another room
- Answers simple "who?," "what?," "where?," "why?" questions
- Talks about activities at school or friend's home
- People outside family usually understand child's speech
- Uses a lot of sentences that have 4 or more words

Red flags: Unintelligible speech; limited vocabulary; short utterances (only 1-2 words); limited consonants; little response to questions or directions.

Review of Red Flags for Developing Speech and Language:

- Little sound play or babbling as infant
- No babbling, pointing, or gesturing by 12 months
- No single words by 16 months
- No spontaneous 2 word phrases by 27 months
- Missed "language explosion" by 30 months
- Any regression in speech, language, or social skills at any age

- No eye contact or response to sounds
- No response to name by 15 months
- No response to directions or questions by 24 months
- Limited number of consonant sounds or vowel distortions by 24 months; low intelligibility for toddler (24-36 months)
- Poor verbal imitation skills by 12 months
- Small vocabulary for age; not much variety

Risk Factors:

- Family history of speech and language disorder
- Medical history of chronic otitis media with effusion
- Limited or poor parental interactions
- Motor disorders/muscle weakness

References:

How Does Your Child Hear and Talk? American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, www.asha.org .

Agin, Marilyn C, M.D., " *The Late Talker-When Silence Isn't Golden*", November 1, 2004, www.contemporarypediatrics.com .

Language Development in Children, www.childdevelopmentinstitute.org .

Resources:

Beyond Baby Talk, by Apel and Masterson, 2001.



If you have concerns about your child's speech and language skills, please talk to your pediatrician and/or call to schedule a speech-language evaluation with a speech-language pathologist. Call 773.880.4441 to schedule an appointment at Children's Memorial Hospital