

Ages and Stages Summary - Language Development 0-5 years

Receptive Language

Learning to Listen, and to Understand Language

Birth

Language learning starts at birth. Even new babies are aware of the sounds in the environment.

They listen to the speech of those close to them, and startle or cry if there is an unexpected noise. Loud noises wake them, and they become "still" in response to new sounds

0-3 months

Astoundingly, between 0-3 months babies learn to turn to you when you speak, and smile when they hear your voice. In fact, they seem to *recognise* your familiar voice, and will quieten at the sound of it if they are crying. Tiny babies under three months will also stop their activity and attend closely to the sound of an unfamiliar voice. They will often respond to comforting tones whether the voice is familiar or not

4-6 months

Then, sometime between 4 to 6 months babies respond to the word "no". They are also responsive to changes in your tone of voice, and to sounds other than speech. For example, they can be fascinated by toys and other objects that make sounds, enjoy music and rhythm, and look in an interested or apprehensive way for the source of all sorts of new sounds such as the toaster, birdsong, the clip-clop of horses' hooves or the whirr of machines.

7-12 months

The 7 to 12 months timeframe is exciting and fun as the baby now obviously listens when spoken to, turns and looks at your face when called by name, and discovers the fun of games like: "round and round the garden", "peep-oh", "I see" and "pat-a-cake" (These simple games and finger plays have regional names and variants).

It is in this period that you realise that he or she recognises the names of familiar objects ("Daddy", "car", "eyes", "phone", "key") and begins to respond to requests ("Give it to Granny") and questions ("More juice?").

1-2 years

Now your child points to pictures in a book when you name them, and can point to a few body parts when asked (nose, eyes, tummy).

He or she can also follow simple commands ("Push the bus!", "Don't touch; it's hot!") and understand simple questions ("Where's the bunny?", "Who likes Miffy?", "What's in your purse?").

Your toddler now likes listening to simple stories and enjoys it when you sing songs or say rhymes. This is a stage in which he or she will want the same story, rhyme or game repeated many times.

2-3 years

By now your toddler will understand two stage commands ("Get your socks and put them in the basket") and understand contrasting concepts or meanings like hot / cold, stop / go, in / on and nice / yucky. He or she notices sounds like the telephone or doorbell ringing and may point or become excited, get you to answer, or attempt to answer themselves.

3-4 years

Your three or four year old understands simple "Who?", "What?" and "Where?" questions, and can hear you when you call from another room. This is an age where hearing difficulties may become evident. If you are in doubt about your child's hearing, see a clinical audiologist.

4-5 years

Children in this age range enjoy stories and can answer simple questions about them. He or she hears and understands nearly everything that is said (within reason) at home or at pre-school or day care.

Your child's ability to hear properly all the time should not be in doubt. If you *are* in doubt about your child's hearing, see a clinical audiologist. If you are in doubt about language comprehension, see a speech-language pathologist / speech and language therapist.

Expressive Language

Learning to Speak and Use Language

Birth

Newborn babies make sounds that let others know that they are experiencing pleasure or pain.

0-3 months

Your baby smiles at you when you come into view. He or she repeats the same sound a lot and "coos and goos" when content. Cries "differentiate". That means, the baby uses a different cry for different situations. For example, one cry says "I'm hungry" and another says "I have a pain".

4-6 months

Gurgling sounds or "vocal play" occur while you are playing with your baby or when they are occupying themselves happily.

Babbling really gets going in this age range, and your baby will sometimes sound as though he or she is "talking".

This "speech-like" babbling includes many sounds including the bilabial (two lip) sounds "p", "b", "w" and "m".

Your baby can tell you, using sounds or gestures that they want something, or want you to do something. He or she can make very "urgent" noises to spur you into action.

7-12 months

The sound of your baby's babbling changes. This is because it now includes more consonants, as well as long and short vowels. He or she uses speech or other sounds (i.e., other than crying) in order to get your attention and hold on to it. *And* your baby's first words (probably not spoken very clearly) have appeared! ("MaMa", "Doggie", "Night Night", "Bye Bye", "No")

1-2 years

Now your baby is accumulating more words as each month passes. He or she will even ask 2-word questions like "Where ball?" "What's that?" "More chippies?" "What that?", and combine two words in other ways to make the Stage 1 Sentence Types ("Birdie go", "No doggie", "More push"). Words are becoming clearer as more initial consonants are used.

2-3 years

Your two or three year old's vocabulary is exploding!

He or she seems to have a word for almost everything. Utterances are usually one, two or three words long and family members can usually understand them.

Your toddler may ask for, or draw your attention to something by naming it ("Elephant") or one of its attributes ("Big!") or by commenting ("Wow!").

3-4 years

Sentences are becoming longer as your child can combine four or more words. He or she talks about things that have happened away from home, and is interested in talking about pre-school, friends, outings and interesting experiences. Speech is usually fluent and clear and "other people" can understand what your child is saying most of the time. In fact, sometimes "other people" hear things you wish they had not!

Overheard on a London bus on April 6, 2011 (the variety of English was RP):

Little Sister (3): It's not fair mummy, my nose won't blow.

Big Brother (4): Why won't Fissy's nose blow, mummy? My nose is a snot factory.

Stuttering and hoarseness

If stuttering (as opposed to normal non-fluency) occurs, see a speech-language pathologist. Stuttering is not a normal part of learning to talk, and neither is persistent hoarseness.

4-5 years

Your child speaks clearly and fluently in an easy-to-listen-to voice.

He or she can construct long and detailed sentences ("We went to the zoo but we had to come home early because Sally wasn't feeling well"; "I want to have a horse of my own like Evan, and Daddy says when he wins the lottery he'll buy me one.").

He or she can tell a long, involved imaginative story sticking to the topic, and using "adult-like" grammar.

Most sounds are pronounced correctly, though he or she may be lisping as a four year old, or, at five, still have difficulty with "r", "v" and "th".

Your child can communicate easily with familiar adults and with other children.

Your child may tell fantastic, dramatic, inventive, "tall stories" (sometimes even scaring themselves!) and engage strangers in conversation when you are out together.