

COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

A GUIDE TO SPEECH & LANGUAGE
DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN



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Hi, I'm Laura! I am a pediatric speech-language pathologist. I received my Bachelor of Science in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology from Loyola University Maryland and my Master of Science in Speech-Language and Hearing Sciences from Boston University. I hold a Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech Language Pathology (CCC-SLP) through the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), and a license to practice in the state of Massachusetts. Throughout my career I have worked with toddlers, preschool, and school-age children in both private practice and public school settings.

In 2022, I started my own private practice, Talking in Strides. As I developed my practice, I recognized the challenges families face in navigating the healthcare system and finding the services they need. My colleague, Alexandra Devlin, and I created The SPOT Collaborative, a directory and collaborative network to help families and professionals quickly and easily find speech, physical, and occupational therapists!

I am committed to helping families and prioritizing quality care. My goal is to provide families with the resources they need to access information and resources!

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ABOUT

Wondering what communication skills your child should be developing? As speech-language pathologists we often get asked this question.

In this guide, review speech and language milestones from infancy to age 3, understand receptive and expressive language and understand what communication skills should be developing at certain ages.

All children develop at their own pace and this is just a guideline, but milestones can be helpful for tracking your child's development and determining whether further assessment or intervention may be necessary.

If you have concerns about your child's language development, seek professional help and guidance by contacting your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist for an evaluation. If you are looking for a speech-language pathologist, search through providers at www.thespotcollaborative.com

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

Receptive language refers to a child's ability to understand spoken language and gestures. It includes areas such as following directions, understanding vocabulary, and appropriately answering questions.

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

Expressive language refers to a child's ability to use language and gestures including vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure to communicate thoughts, needs, feelings, and ideas.

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONE

A milestone is a skill that 90% of children are able to do at a certain age. The average is what 50% of children are able to do at a certain age. Milestones are the minimum level that we are expecting a child to achieve. For example, 90% of 1 year olds are able to say 1 word by 12 months, while 50% of children have 5+ words.

Missing milestones is your first clue that something might be going on with your child's development and are worthy of a discussion with your doctor or speech-language pathologist.

HOW MANY WORDS SHOULD MY CHILD SAY?

AGE	MILESTONE	AVERAGE
12 MONTHS	1	5
15 MONTHS	5	10
18 MONTHS	10	50
24 MONTHS	50	300
30 MONTHS	200	450
36 MONTHS	250	1,000

WHAT COUNTS AS A WORD?

First words are anything used consistently, independently and purposefully/with meaning.

1

SINGLE WORDS

“cup”

2

APPROXIMATIONS

words that aren't clear “ba” for ball or “tat” for cat

3

SYMBOLIC SOUNDS

animal sounds, vehicle sounds (e.g., “moo,” “beep!”)

4

EXCLAMATORY SOUNDS

“uh oh!” “wow” “wee”

5

WORDS IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE

if the child says the same word in a different language, it counts as a separate word

6

SIGN LANGUAGE

child consistently signs “more” every time they want you to sing a song again

COMMUNICATION MILESTONES

0-3 MONTHS

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Turns head to sounds
- ☐ Quiets or smiles when spoken too
- ☐ Seems to recognize your voice and quiets if crying
- ☐ Turns or looks toward voices or people talking

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Makes vowel/cooing sounds
- ☐ Smiles at you
- ☐ Cries differently for different needs

COMMUNICATION MILESTONES

3-6 MONTHS

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Moves eyes in the direction of sound
- ☐ Watches your face when you're talking
- ☐ Responds to changes in the tone of your voice
- ☐ Looks at objects of interest and follows objects with eyes
- ☐ Notices that toys make sounds

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Giggles and laughs. Enjoys social games
- ☐ Coos and babbles
- ☐ Blows "raspberries"
- ☐ Makes sounds when happy or upset
- ☐ Vocalizes different vowel sounds, beginning to combine with some early consonants ("ba" "puh" "ma")

COMMUNICATION MILESTONES

6-9 MONTHS

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Begins to respond to their name
- ☐ Recognizes the names of some people and understands a few words and phrases
- ☐ Joint attention emerges

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Reduplicated babbling (e.g., mamama)
- ☐ Imitates some simple actions, gestures, sounds
- ☐ Uses gestures (e.g., pushing items away, reaching for items, lifts arms to be picked up) and sounds to communicate

COMMUNICATION MILESTONES

9-12 MONTHS

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Follows simple directions with gestures
- ☐ Understands approximately 50 common words and phrases (e.g., juice, cup, shoes, “come here”, “no”)
- ☐ Responds to their name
- ☐ Looks when you point.

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Plays games with you, like peek-a-boo
- ☐ Points to objects and uses other early gestures such as waving and clapping
- ☐ Imitates actions in songs/social games, Imitates speech sounds
- ☐ Babbling longer strings of sounds (“bababa” “magada”)
- ☐ Says 1 word around 1st birthday

COMMUNICATION MILESTONES

12-15 MONTHS

RECEPTIVE

LANGUAGE

☐ Follows one-step directions with adult help (get your shoes, give it to me)

- ☐ Uses more than 1 toy appropriately
- ☐ Understands common words and phrases

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Uses 5-10 words
- ☐ Babbles in long string with adult-like intonation (jargon)
- ☐ Imitates sounds in play (moo, beep, aw, choo choo)
- ☐ Uses ~10 or more intentional gestures (waves, shaking head no, points, claps)

COMMUNICATION MILESTONES

15-18 MONTHS

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Follows one-step directions independently
- ☐ Points to identify common objects and body parts
- ☐ Understands common words and phrases

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Uses 20-50 words
- ☐ Imitates simple words (mama, ball up)
- ☐ Begins to name pictures in books
- ☐ Speech is ~25% intelligible (“pih” for “pig”)

COMMUNICATION MILESTONES

18-24 MONTHS

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Follows simple 2-step directions
- ☐ Understands common verbs
- ☐ Responds to simple questions (What's that? Where is the ball?)
- ☐ Responds to yes/no questions

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Uses at least 50 words (uses 50-200 words)
- ☐ Begins to combine two-word phrases
- ☐ Uses words more than gestures to communicate
- ☐ Engages in longer conversation and begins to take turns in conversation

COMMUNICATION MILESTONES

24-36 MONTHS

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Follows 2-3 step directions
- ☐ Understands directions with concepts such as on, off, under, big, little)
- ☐ Understands and answers simple WH-questions(who, what, where, what doing?)

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Uses at least 250 words
- ☐ Uses 2-4 word phrases
- ☐ Vocabulary includes nouns, verbs, descriptors and location words (in, out, on, under, up, down)
- ☐ Uses verbs with -ing (sleeping, eating) and some plurals
- ☐ Uses pronouns (I, me, we, you)
- ☐ Asks simple questions (who, what, where, why)
- ☐ Speech is 50-75% intelligible

SOURCES

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