3 to 4 Years: What to Expect

Speech and language milestones for this age, plus the signs that are worth a call to a speech-language pathologist.



AGE
3-4 years

INTELLIGIBILITY
ASHA's wording: by age 4, the child speaks so that people can understand most of what they say

What to expect

- Compares things using comparative words
- Tells stories from books or videos
- Understands and uses location words like inside, on and under
- Uses articles - a, the - in speech
- Pretends to read, alone or with others
- Recognizes signs and logos like STOP
- Pretends to write or spell, and writes some letters
- Says all the syllables in a word
- Says the sounds at the beginning, middle and end of words
- Correctly produces t, k, g, f, y and -ing in words
- By 4, says all the sounds in a two-consonant cluster - the "tw" in "tweet" or the "nd" in "sand"
- By 4, talks smoothly and does not repeat sounds, words or phrases most of the time

ASHA's wording: by age 4, the child speaks so that people can understand most of what they say. Errors on the later sounds - l, j, r, sh, ch, s, v, z and th (Crowe & McLeod, 2020) - are still expected.

Worth a Conversation

- ! Unfamiliar adults cannot understand the child
- ! Not using sentences of three or more words
- ! Cannot answer simple "who" or "what" questions
- ! Repeats sounds or words with visible effort, tension or frustration

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You never need a referral to ask a speech-language pathologist for an evaluation, and you never need to wait and see. If you are wondering whether to call, that is reason enough.