Speech and Language Milestones

What to expect at every age, and when to ask for help.



AGES
Birth to 7 years

These age bands follow ASHA's Developmental Milestones. Every range is wide on purpose: a child may not reach a milestone until the end of their range. One missed milestone in an otherwise chatty, curious child is usually nothing. Several in the same band, or a skill that was there and then disappeared, is worth a conversation.

Birth to 1 Year (0-12 months)



Birth to 3 months

- Alerts to sound
- Quiets or smiles when you talk to them
- Turns or looks toward voices and people talking
- Recognizes loved ones and some familiar objects
- Makes sounds back and forth with you
- Makes different sounds depending on whether they are happy or upset
- Coos - sounds like ooooo, aahh and mmmmm

4 to 6 months

- Responds to facial expressions
- Looks at things that interest them and follows objects with their eyes
- Reacts to toys that make sounds, like bells or music
- Giggles and laughs
- Vocalizes during play or with objects in their mouth
- Vocalizes different vowel sounds, sometimes combined with a consonant
- Blows raspberries

7 to 9 months

- Looks at you when you call their name
- Stops for a moment when you say "no"
- Recognizes the names of some people and objects
- Looks for loved ones when upset
- Babbles long strings of sounds - mamamama, upup, babababa
- Raises arms to be picked up
- Pushes away things they do not want

10 to 12 months

- Responds to simple words and phrases like "go bye-bye" and "look at Mommy"
- Reaches for objects by about 10 months
- Points, waves, and shows or gives you objects
- Imitates and starts gestures during social play
- Tries to copy sounds that you make
- Enjoys dancing
- Says one or two words - mama, dada, hi, bye

Worth a conversation

- No babbling by 9 months
- No gestures such as pointing or waving by 12 months
- Does not respond to their name
- Does not look where you point
- Does not react to sound at all, at any age in this band

13 to 18 Months (13-18 months)



What to expect

- Looks around when asked "where" questions, like "where is your blanket?"
- Follows directions - "give me the ball", "hug the teddy bear", "come here", "show me your nose"
- Points to make requests, to comment, or to get information
- Shakes their head for no and nods for yes
- Understands and uses words for common objects, some actions, and the people in their life
- Identifies one or more body parts
- Uses gestures when excited, like clapping or a high-five, or when being silly
- Combines long strings of sounds, syllables and real words with speech-like inflection

Worth a conversation

- No words at all by 18 months
- Does not point to request or to show you things
- Does not follow simple one-step directions
- Loses words or skills they previously had

19 to 24 Months (19-24 months)



What to expect

- Uses and understands at least 50 different words - food, toys, animals, body parts
- Speech may not always be clear - "du" for shoe, or "dah" for dog, is expected here
- Puts two or more words together - "more water", "go outside"
- Follows two-step directions - "get the spoon and put it on the table"
- Uses words like me, mine and you
- Uses words to ask for help
- Uses possessives, like "Daddy's sock"

Worth a conversation

- Fewer than 50 words by 24 months
- No two-word combinations by 24 months
- Does not imitate sounds, words or actions

- Loses words or skills they previously had

2 to 3 Years (2-3 years)



What to expect

- Uses word combinations often, though may still repeat some words or phrases
- Tries to get your attention - "look at me!"
- Says their name when asked
- Uses some plural words, like birds or toys
- Uses -ing verbs like eating or running, and adds -ed to talk about past actions
- Gives reasons for things and events - needing a coat because it is cold
- Asks "why" and "how"
- Answers questions like "what do you do when you are sleepy?"
- Correctly produces p, b, m, h, w, d and n in words
- Correctly produces most vowels in words

Worth a conversation

- Not combining words into short phrases
- Family cannot understand most of what the child says
- Does not follow two-step directions
- Does not ask questions

3 to 4 Years (3-4 years)



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

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

4 to 5 Years (4-5 years)



What to expect

- Produces grammatically correct sentences, which are longer and more complex
- Tells stories with main characters and a setting, joined with words like "and"
- Uses at least one irregular plural form, like feet or men
- Understands and uses location words like behind, beside and between
- Uses time words like yesterday and tomorrow correctly
- Follows simple directions and rules to play games
- Locates the front of a book and its title

- Recognizes and names 10 or more letters, and can usually write their own name
- Imitates reading and writing from left to right
- Blends word parts - cup + cake = cupcake - and identifies some rhyming words like cat and hat
- Produces most consonants correctly

Worth a conversation

- Still difficult for unfamiliar adults to understand
- Grammar errors a younger child would make
- Cannot tell a simple story with a beginning and an end
- Struggles to follow classroom directions

5 to 7 Years (5-7 years)



What to expect

- Produces every consonant correctly, including r, vocalic r and th
- Uses complex sentences with conjunctions - because, so, but, if
- Tells organized stories with a clear beginning, middle and end
- Explains how and why things happen
- Follows multi-step classroom directions
- Repairs communication breakdowns - "no, I meant..."
- Adjusts how they talk for different listeners and settings
- Reads and writes simple text

Worth a conversation

- Any sound errors remaining after age 7
- Difficulty telling or following stories
- Trouble finding words in conversation
- Struggles with rhyming, letter sounds or early reading