

FRANK K. HEHNLY SCHOOL  
CLARK, NEW JERSEY



GUIDELINES  
FOR  
PARENTS

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From Baby's first word to the first time he strings together a complete sentence, there's a lot to look forward to as his speech and language advance. But it can be hard to know if your toddlers and preschoolers are making the right progress.

"Every child develops on his own timeline, but the best way to help develop your baby's language skills is to simply talk to him," says Rahil Briggs, Psy.D., a child psychologist at The Children's Hospital at Montefiore in New York City. "The number-one way children learn to speak and boost their vocabulary is by listening to their parents at home," Dr. Briggs says. To help, we've listed the typical language milestones you should look out for at each age. If you feel your child isn't developing at a steady pace, always consult your pediatrician for advice.

## Age 1

Your little one is just beginning to communicate with you beyond crying. At this age, your baby should be able to:

**Say a handful of words.** Your toddler still has a limited vocabulary at this point, but you can help it grow by reading and talking to him every day, Dr. Briggs recommends. "At this age, the main concern is that baby's speech is 'mama' and 'dada' specific, meaning that when he says those two words he is actually referring to Mom and Dad -- not the cup or dog."

**Imitate your voice.** Even though your little one isn't saying many words, he is babbling a lot and attempting to imitate the sounds heard from others around her. Parents "should be hearing vowel and consonant babbling by 8 or 9 months, and it continues as baby starts to form words around 12 months," Dr. Briggs says.

**Respond accordingly.** Pediatricians are mostly concerned with your child's receptive language right now. Does he recognize your voice? Does he turn his

head toward different sounds? Does he laugh when others laugh? "Even at this age, he can communicate with intent and get what he wants by pointing or looking toward an object. He should also be able to follow your eyes and look where you're looking," says Kenn Apel, Ph.D., president of the Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders in Minneapolis and co-author of *Beyond Baby Talk*. These responsive actions are more important than how many words your child can say.

**Follow simple direction.** In addition to responding, see if your child follows simple one-step directions and commands, such as raising his arms when you say "up," drinking his milk when you tell him to, handing you a toy upon request, and stopping what he's doing when you tell him "no" (although he will probably try to do it again!).

## **Age 2**

This age is the magic number for knowing if a child is on track with speech or is a late talker. Around this period, your growing toddler should be able to:

**Expand vocabulary.** By 24 months, your child should be using about 50 words regularly, such as *more*, *juice*, and *Grandma*. "The year between 12 and 24 months is the most exciting year in terms of language development," Dr. Briggs says. "Your [tot] is having a vocabulary boost and should be repeating words she hears from you."

**Link together words.** You should also notice your little one putting together two-word sentences ("My ball" or "Car go"). But don't worry about pronunciation at this point -- only about 50 percent of what she says will be completely understandable.

**Use pronouns.** By now your tot will start to understand the concept of "me" and "you" -- although she might not always use the words properly. For example, she might refer to Dad as "she" and herself as "you." This is common and nothing to worry about -- she'll get the hang of it in time.

**Identify objects and body parts.** Your child should be able to point to her nose, eyes, mouth, and so forth, and start saying each body part, although many children will point well before they can verbalize it. Your little one can also point to pictures of the correct objects when prompted with "Where is the ball?" or "Show me the dog."

### **Age 3**

Your little one is developing into quite the chatterbox. By now, your preschooler should be able to:

**Speak clearly in simple sentences.** By the time preschool rolls around, you should easily understand what your kid says -- or at least 75 percent of it. "You can hold a conversation with a child this age where he asks you questions and tells you things that happened in his day," Dr. Briggs says.

**String multiple words together.** You'll be amazed at how your little one is talking in sentences made up of between three and six words. "They are complete sentences, but simple ones, such as 'Mommy is eating,'" Dr. Apel says.

**Choose the right words.** The days of pointing to something he wants are definitely over. He should know a word for almost everything he wants to identify, and he should be able to ask for or indicate objects verbally.

**Follow two-part requests.** Understanding and carrying out more complicated requests is another development. Your tot should be able to act accordingly when directed with commands, such as "Please take off your boots and put them on the

shelf." "These should still be simple directions used in an everyday context so that it's something he's experienced before," Dr. Apel says. "If it's a brand-new experience, it might be more difficult for your child to carry it out."

## **Age 4**

You're officially in "big boy/big girl" territory now. Your child is growing in leaps and bounds, and her language is getting quite impressive. At this age, your child should be able to:

**Speak clearly in more complex sentences.** Your growing preschooler now has the ability to tell you an entire story -- such as the cool stuff she's doing at preschool -- and you can understand nearly every word of it. "By [the time your child is age] 4, even strangers should be able to understand what [she] is saying," Dr. Apel says.

**Identify colors, shapes and letters.** Experts say your child should be able to name at least some colors, shapes, and letters. Take every chance to explore different letters and words with her, Dr. Apel suggests. "You can take any moment, such as eating breakfast, as a chance to teach her something new. For instance, explain how *Cheerios* is a long word, but *milk* is a short one. It might take only a few minutes, but a child can learn a lot in that short amount of time."

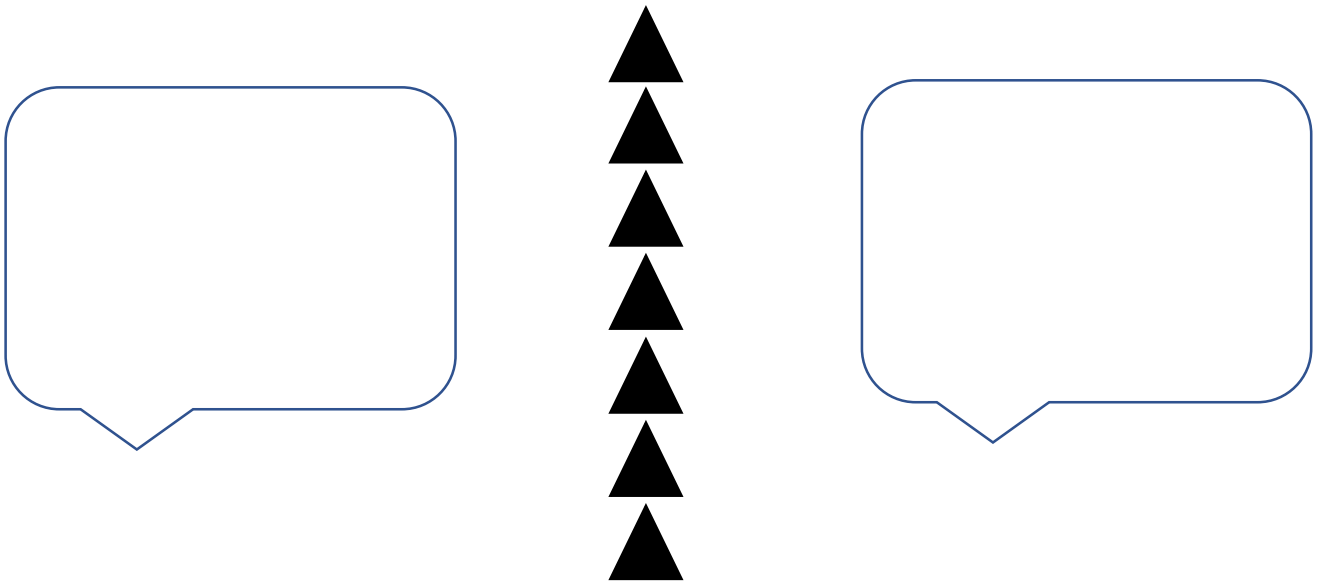
**Understand the concept of time.** Your child might not be able to tell time yet, but she should understand the general concept of ordering moments throughout the day (breakfast in the morning, lunch in the afternoon, dinner at night). "It's important for kids to have some redundancy in life," Dr. Apel explains. "Doing the same things each day is good because it allows them to concentrate on picking up the language around them, not the task."

**Follow more complex commands.** At 4, your child should be able to follow three- or four-step commands, such as "Put your book away, brush your teeth, and then get in bed." Your child should also be able to verbalize her own wants and needs, making requests such as "I want pizza for dinner and I want to watch *Toy Story* before bed." Pediatricians and speech pathologists are always on the lookout for issues with receptive language, so if your child can't follow instructions or doesn't seem to understand what you're saying, consult the doctor right away.

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You can help your child talk clearer by...

- Being a good speech model for your child. Don't use baby talk.
- Pronouncing words clearly, slowly, and correctly for your child to hear and imitate.
- Trying to look at your child when you both are talking.
- Letting the child watch your face, lips and tongue as you form sounds and words.
- Prolonging the speech sound the child has difficulty saying, such as "where is your ssssock?"
- Repeating new words and sounds over and over. Use them often in your conversation with the child.
- Making a scrapbook with the child. Cut out and paste pictures of objects the child learns to say or recognize.
- Praising the child when sounds are correct, especially if the sounds were previously difficult for the child.



Speech Sounds:  
Age at which they should be acquired  
Years;Months

Sound	Age of Acquisition Female	Age of Acquisition Male
m	3 years, 0 months	3 years, 0 months
n	3 years, 6 months	3 years, 0 months
ng (sing)	7 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
h-	3 years, 0 months	3 years, 0 months
w-	3 years, 0 months	3 years, 0 months
y (yes)	4 years, 0 months	5 years, 0 months
p	3 years, 0 months	3 years, 0 months
b	3 years, 0 months	3 years, 0 months
t	4 years, 0 months	3 years, 6 months
d	3 years, 0 months	3 years, 6 months
k	3 years, 6 months	3 years, 6 months
g	3 years, 6 months	4 years, 0 months
f-	3 years, 6 months	3 years, 6 months
-f	5 years, 6 months	5 years, 6 months
v	5 years, 6 months	5 years, 6 months
th (thin without voice)	6 years, 0 months	8 years, 0 months
th (this with voice)	4 years, 6 months	7 years, 0 months
s	7 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
z	7 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
sh (sheep)	6 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months

ch (chair)	6 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
dg (jar)	6 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
l-	5 years, 0 months	6 years, 0 months
-l	6 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
r-	8 years, 0 months	8 years, 0 months
er (later)	8 years, 0 months	8 years, 0 months
Start of word sound combinations	Age of acquisitions Female	Age of Acquisition Male
tw / kw	4 years, 0 months	5 years, 6 months
sp / st / sk	7 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
sm / sn	7 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
sw	7 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
sl	7 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
pl / bl / kl / gl / fl	5 years, 6 months	6 years, 0 months
pr / br / tr / dr / kr / gr / fr	8 years, 0 months	8 years, 0 months
thr (three voiceless)	9 years, 0 months	9 years, 0 months
skw	7 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
spl	7 years, 0 months	7 years, 0 months
spr / str / skr	9 years, 0 months	9 years, 0 months

Key:

m refers to either before or after a vowel

h- Refers to before a vowel

-f Refers to after a vowel

Smit, Hand, Freilinger, Bernthal, and Bird (1990). *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders*, 55, 779-798.