

How to Identify Speech-Language Milestones and Facilitate Growth at Home

By Paula Acuña

Parents' primary responsibility is ensuring the health and wellness of their children. Part of that onerous task includes knowing how to monitor and encourage physical, cognitive, linguistic, and social development, especially in the early years of life.

This guide highlights the general communication milestones expected from birth to 24 months of age. Keep in mind that children develop at their own pace. If concerns persist beyond a few months, please seek professional support.

Birth to 6 months:

At this young age, infants react to sights and sounds. Babies often coo, babble, laugh, and have different cries for different needs. During this early stage, talk throughout the day about what you see, what you are doing, and where you are going. Respond to your baby's vocalizations and facial expressions. These are attempts to communicate! Begin reading aloud daily, using colorful, repetitive/rhythmic books, and an expressive voice.

7 to 12 months:

By age 1, children typically respond to their name and recognize objects by label, point or reach for desired objects, understand simple instructions, and use gestures. Speech may include more complex babbling, 2-5 early words, and imitation of sounds. To encourage language development at this age caregivers should



respond to babbling, model good speech, incorporate nursery rhymes or simple songs into routines, teach the names of everyday items and familiar people, take the child to new places and situations, play simple games such as "peek-a-boo" and "pat-a-cake".

Year 1 to 2:

Between 12-18 months, most children respond to 'no', understand simple commands and questions, point to a few body parts, make animal sounds, use 10-30 words meaningfully, and begin to combine words.

By 24 months of age, children can typically follow two-step commands, use at least 50 words, begin to ask what, who, and where questions, and use two-word sentences. Speech sounds expected by this age include p, b, m, h, w, and vowels.

- To promote language development at this age, caregivers should aim to:
- encourage, reward, and praise efforts to speak
- narrate everyday routines
- talk simply, clearly, and slowly
- talk about new situations before you go, while there, and again when home
- model appropriate eye contact
- describe what your child does, feels, and hears
- play children's music

This is a great age to have your child participate in daily reading time by choosing books, turning pages, pointing to pictures, and naming items! Make comments, respond to questions, and read the same book many times. To learn more about an initiative between the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and Read Aloud 15 MINUTES and access their free parent resource, visit identifythesigns.org/communicating-with-baby-toolkit/.

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