

BUILDING SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Skills in speech (sound pronunciation) and language (listening, understanding and using words) develop in an orderly way, although the pace may differ for different children. Below are general guidelines. Most children will show the listed skills within six months of the times listed:

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE MILESTONES

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|----------|-----------------------|
| 1 year: | 1 word sentences |
| 2 years: | 2 word sentences |
| 3 years: | 3 to 5 word sentences |
| 4 years: | 4 to 7 word sentences |

EXPRESSIVE VOCABULARY

| | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 year: | 1-10 words |
| 1 1/2 years: | 10 - 100 words |
| 2 years: | 100 - 250 words |
| 2 1/2 years: | 250 - 400 words |
| 3 years: | 450 - 900 words |
| 4 years: | 1500 + words |

SPEECH MILESTONES

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|----------|---|
| 3 year: | sounds of the letters: m, b, p, h, w and all vowels |
| 4 years: | k, g, t, d, n, ng, f |
| 5 years: | s, z, ʃ, v, y, th, sh, wh, ch |
| 6 years: | r, j |

SPEECH INTELLIGIBILITY (how well others understand your child)

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| 2 years | 25% |
| 2 1/2 years | 60% - 65% |
| 3 years | 75% - 90% |
| 4 years | 90% |

FLUENCY

Stuttering in the preschool years is normal. Be sure to give your child time to say what he is trying to say.

ACTIVITIES

Here are some things you can do to help build your child's speech and language skills:

TALK, TALK, TALK - Describe what your child is doing as he does it ("You're smiling"). Talk about how she feels, ("You're happy because you have your favorite toy"). Name people ("Look, there's your sister") and everyday objects ("bottles, juice, bed, diaper"). Mention features of objects ("That ball is red and it's big. It is a big red ball"). Talk about sounds around you and imitate them (cat's meowing, dogs barking, bacon sizzling). Sing songs and say nursery rhymes.

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN - Conversations have two sides. Follow your child's lead and talk about things he brings up. Give him a chance to label things ("Oh, you're thirsty. You want a drink. What do you want?"). A young child will need an example ("There's the orange juice. Orange juice tastes good."). An older toddler may need a choice ("Do you want juice or

milk?"). A young child may say only part of a sentence such as "want truck". You can expand on this and answer ("OK, you want the big truck" or "Here is the big yellow truck. It carries dirt! Vroom.").

READ, READ, READ - Start reading early even though your child may be too young to understand what you are saying. This helps children learn that reading is fun. Early on, let your children explore the books, as they want to (using cloth books or action books like Pat the Bunny). Encourage your child to name the pictures ("What's that?", "What do you think will happen next?", "Look, the bunny ate the carrots.").

EXPLORE, EXPLORE, EXPLORE - Go places: to the grocery store, the gas station, the park, the library. Talk about it all. Ask your child what he sees and what were his favorite things and why.

DO, DO, DO - Let your child help do things for him ("We have to get dressed. Go get your ((new), (black), (tennis) shoes). Let your child help you do things and talk about them while you do them ("Let's wash the dishes. I'm getting the sponge. I'm putting soap on it. Now, there is soap on the sponge. Can you turn on the water?"). Meal and bath times are great opportunities for sharing conversation.

TIPS

- Keep natural eye contact while your child is talking.
- Listen patiently. Respond to the message rather than the way your child says it.
- Set a good example. Speak slowly and without rushing.
- Spend time every day with your child, conversing in an unhurried, relaxed way.

REMEMBER

- Talking is special and fun
- Praise your child's efforts to talk. Don't correct grammar. Just repeat her sentence with a grammatically correct example
- Use other natural cues when talking and listening. Facial expressions, gestures, and body language communicate a lot
- Repeat main ideas frequently and in different ways
- Remember talking and communicating is a natural thing: "just do it"
- If you have concerns about your child's speech and language skills, discuss it with your child's doctor or a speech-language pathologist

NATIONAL RESOURCES

American Speech-Language Hearing Association

www.asha.org

Stuttering Foundation of America

www.stutteringhelp.org

The Audiology Foundation of America

www.audfound.org