



Speech & Language Milestones: Birth Through 5 Years

Every child develops at their own pace, but speech and language skills generally follow a predictable sequence. Knowing what to expect can help you recognize your child's progress and identify when additional support may be beneficial.

Remember: Missing one milestone does not automatically mean your child needs therapy. However, if you have ongoing concerns, trust your instincts and discuss them with your child's pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist.

Birth to 6 Months

Your baby may:

- Startle to loud sounds.
- Calm when hearing a familiar voice.
- Turn toward voices and sounds.
- Smile and laugh socially.
- Make cooing sounds such as "oo" and "ah."
- Cry differently for different needs.
- Watch your face while you talk.

Encourage communication by:

- Talking throughout the day.
 - Singing songs.
 - Smiling and making eye contact.
 - Responding when your baby coos.
 - Reading simple board books.
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6 to 12 Months

Your baby may:

- Respond to their name.
- Understand simple words like "no" or "bye-bye."
- Babble with repeated sounds such as "bababa" or "dadada."

- Use gestures like reaching, pointing, waving, or raising arms to be picked up.
- Look where you point.
- Say one or two meaningful words by 12 months (such as "mama," "dada," or "ball").

Encourage communication by:

- Naming everyday objects.
 - Playing peek-a-boo.
 - Using gestures while talking.
 - Reading together every day.
 - Giving your baby opportunities to take turns "talking."
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12 to 18 Months

Your toddler may:

- Use 10–20 words.
- Point to familiar pictures.
- Follow one-step directions.
- Identify common body parts.
- Imitate words you say.
- Use gestures along with words.

Encourage communication by:

- Expanding on your child's words.
 - Child: "Ball."
 - Parent: "Big ball!"
 - Giving choices.
 - "Do you want milk or water?"
 - Reading books together daily.
 - Talking during meals, bath time, and play.
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18 to 24 Months

Your toddler may:

- Use at least 50 words.
- Combine two words ("more juice," "Daddy go").
- Follow simple directions.
- Ask simple questions.
- Enjoy pretend play.
- Be understood by familiar adults about 50% of the time.

Encourage communication by:

- Waiting several seconds after asking a question.
 - Talking about what your child is doing.
 - Encouraging pretend play.
 - Singing familiar songs.
 - Offering opportunities for your child to request favorite items.
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2 to 3 Years

Your child may:

- Use 2–4 word sentences.
- Ask "what," "where," and "who" questions.
- Follow two-step directions.
- Understand simple concepts like "big," "little," "in," and "on."
- Enjoy conversations.
- Be understood by familiar listeners most of the time.

Encourage communication by:

- Reading interactive books.
 - Expanding conversations.
 - Playing pretend together.
 - Asking open-ended questions.
 - Encouraging storytelling.
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3 to 4 Years

Your child may:

- Speak in complete sentences.
- Tell simple stories.
- Answer questions about familiar events.
- Follow three-step directions.
- Use most speech sounds correctly.
- Be understood by unfamiliar listeners about 75–90% of the time.

Encourage communication by:

- Playing games that require conversation.
 - Asking your child to describe pictures.
 - Talking about daily routines.
 - Encouraging imaginative play.
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4 to 5 Years**Your child may:**

- Carry on conversations.
- Tell detailed stories.
- Understand time concepts such as yesterday and tomorrow.
- Use grammar correctly most of the time.
- Answer "why" and "how" questions.
- Be understood by unfamiliar listeners nearly 100% of the time.

Encourage communication by:

- Reading longer stories.
 - Asking prediction questions.
 - Playing word games.
 - Encouraging your child to explain their ideas.
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Red Flags: When to Seek an Evaluation

Consider contacting a speech-language pathologist if your child:

- Does not babble by 9 months.
 - Does not respond to their name by 12 months.
 - Has no meaningful words by 15 months.
 - Uses fewer than 50 words by 24 months.
 - Is not combining two words by 24 months.
 - Has difficulty following simple directions.
 - Is difficult to understand compared to peers.
 - Loses previously acquired speech or language skills.
 - Shows frustration when trying to communicate.
 - Has concerns with feeding or oral motor skills.
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Remember

Communication develops during everyday moments. Talking, reading, singing, playing, and sharing meals all provide valuable opportunities for children to learn language.

If you ever have concerns about your child's speech, language, or feeding development, early intervention can make a meaningful difference.

Questions?

We're here to help.

Schedule your Free 15-Minute Consultation at www.1stfoundationstherapy.com

1st Foundations Pediatric Therapy

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