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SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

**My Child's Language Development: What to Expect**

Language development can be divided into two main parts: understanding of language (**receptive language**) and use of voice, words, and sentences to communicate (**expressive language**).

| Age                                   | Understanding (Receptive Language)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Talking (Expressive Language)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Birth-3 months</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Startles to loud sounds</li> <li>Recognizes primary caregiver's voice</li> <li>Smiles or quiets when spoken to</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cries differently for different needs (hunger, anger, pain)</li> <li>Smiles at familiar people</li> <li>Coos using vowel sounds</li> </ul>                                                                                                                        |
| <b>3-6 months</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looks toward sounds</li> <li>Reacts to changes in tone of voice</li> <li>Attends to toys that make noise and music</li> <li>Listens to a speaker and watches the speaker's face</li> </ul>                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coos more frequently and laughs</li> <li>Exhibits vocal play such as raspberries, squeals, and lip smacking</li> <li>Early babbling begins (consonant sounds)</li> </ul>                                                                                          |
| <b>6-12 months</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responds to name</li> <li>Recognizes names for familiar items</li> <li>Begins to respond to simple requests (<i>come here</i>)</li> <li>Responds to sounds when the source is not visible</li> <li>Listens with increased interest to new words</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Babbles by repeating the same consonant sound (<i>bababa</i>) at 6-8 months</li> <li>Babbles with different consonant sounds (<i>bawada</i>) at 8-10 months</li> <li>Jargon develops in which babbling has a conversational intonation at 10-12 months</li> </ul> |
| <b>12-18 months</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follows one-step directions with cues (<i>Give me the cup</i>)</li> <li>Understands simple questions (<i>Where's Daddy?</i>)</li> <li>Identifies basic body parts (<i>head, foot</i>) at 18 months</li> </ul>                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces 2-10 words at 12-15 months</li> <li>Uses voice, words, and gestures to communicate at 12-15 months, then mostly words at 16-18 months</li> <li>Imitates animal sounds</li> </ul>                                                                         |
| <b>18-24 months<br/>(1 ½ - 2 yrs)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listens to simple stories</li> <li>Points to named objects in a book</li> <li>Recognizes family labels (<i>grandma, baby</i>)</li> <li>Identifies advanced body parts (<i>chin, elbow</i>)</li> </ul>                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces 20-50 words by 18 months</li> <li>Begins to combine words into two-word utterances</li> <li>Imitates 2- and 3-word sentences</li> <li>Names some body parts</li> <li>Enjoys humming and singing</li> </ul>                                               |
| <b>2 - 3 years</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follows two-step directions (e.g., <i>Get your shoes and put them on</i>)</li> <li>Follows directions with modifiers (<i>walk slowly, get the red ball</i>)</li> <li>Identifies common verbs in pictures</li> </ul>                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces 200-300 words at 2 years and 450 words at 2.5 years</li> <li>Uses 2- and 3-word phrases for a variety of purposes</li> <li>Uses some pronouns (not always correctly)</li> </ul>                                                                          |
| <b>3 - 4 years</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understands simple wh- questions</li> <li>Improves listening skills and begins to learn from listening</li> <li>Understands most simple questions related to activities and environment</li> </ul>                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces about 1,000 words at 3 years</li> <li>Routinely uses subject-verb-object forms (<i>the girl eats the apple</i>)</li> <li>Asks what, where, and who questions</li> <li>Begins to use complex sentences</li> </ul>                                         |

| Age              | Understanding (Receptive Language)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Talking (Expressive Language)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>4-5 years</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attends to a short story and answers questions about it</li> <li>Understands most of what others say at home and at school</li> <li>Repeats 4 digits when said slowly</li> <li>Follows three-step directions with cues</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces approximately 1,600 words at 4 years and 2,200 words at 5 years</li> <li>Uses complex sentences more frequently</li> <li>Uses negative (<i>don't, isn't</i>) and question forms correctly (<i>Do you, Can you, Are we</i>)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                          |
| <b>5-6 years</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeats sentences up to nine words in length</li> <li>Understands opposites, <i>left/right</i>, number concepts up to 20,</li> <li>May still be confused at times by more complex sentences</li> </ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By age 5 has mastery of most sentence structure rules and can converse easily</li> <li>Formulates short, well-structured stories</li> <li>Uses complex prepositions (<i>through, nearest</i>), adjectives, <i>yesterday/tomorrow</i></li> <li>Uses past and future tenses correctly</li> <li>Continues to master irregular morphological and syntactic forms</li> </ul> |

### **Red Flags in Communication Development**

If your child demonstrates any of the warning signs below, consult a speech-language pathologist to determine if a speech and language assessment is appropriate.

| Age              | Red Flags                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>6 months</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not laugh and squeal</li> <li>Does not look toward new sounds</li> </ul>                                       |
| <b>9 months</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has limited to no babbling</li> <li>Does not indicate when happy or upset</li> </ul>                                |
| <b>12 months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not point to objects</li> <li>Does not use gestures such as waving or shaking head</li> </ul>                  |
| <b>15 months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has not used first word</li> <li>Does not respond to <i>no</i> and <i>bye-bye</i></li> </ul>                        |
| <b>18 months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not use at least 6-10 words consistently</li> <li>Does not hear well or discriminate between sounds</li> </ul> |
| <b>20 months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not use at least 6 consonant sounds</li> <li>Does not follow simple directions</li> </ul>                      |
| <b>24 months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has a limited vocabulary of less than 50 words</li> <li>Has decreased interest in social interactions</li> </ul>    |
| <b>36 months</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strangers have difficulty understanding what the child is saying</li> <li>Does not use simple sentences</li> </ul>  |

(Sources: Linguistics Guide to Communication Milestones, Lanza and Flahive, 2008; ASHA.org; Resource Manual for Speech Language Pathology, 2001)