



gretchen's
house

So you want to know more about...

Language Development

Talk, talk, talk...

Speech and language development encompasses much more than vocabulary and pronunciation. It includes:

- **Conversation.** This involves taking turns, paying attention to others, and responding to questions. It takes a lifetime to master! Babies begin working on this skill when they coo and babble to adults and imitate our inflection.
- **Social skills.** We want children to be polite. But what does that *mean*? An inquisitive, "Can I have some?" is much friendlier than a grudging, "Please!"

The spirit of our speech can be more meaningful than actual content. Children also need to know how to approach other children and adults; how to ask for help; how to express their feelings.

- **Bad words.** Potty talk (and swearing) is a typical and totally normal development. Kids realize the enormous power of words and experiment with them in safe settings. The best cure? A disinterested response. Potty talk becomes boring even for kids when they can only do it in the bathroom! See the **Potty Talk Purple Page** for more information.

- **Name-calling.** Name-calling is a lazy way to convey anger or hurt feelings. Rather than focusing on the symptom, we try to help the child access and label his true feelings. "You sound angry."

Besides counting words or syllables, try noticing your child's *other* language milestones. "You said that well!" is high praise for a child trying to master a convention of speech. Happy chatting!

Supporting Developing Language

- Recognize that your child is an individual. Avoid comparisons.
- Talk to your child: in the car, while she bathes, at the dinner table.
- Model good listening skills.
- Repeat what your child says back to her.
- Read to your child every day. As you read, pause to let your child process. Ask questions about what might happen next.
- Turn off the television. "Interactive" programming is a poor substitute for face-to-face human interaction.
- Sing call-and-response songs that invite your child to join in.

If your child is slow to speak and lacks comprehension, she may need a hearing screening. Try speaking to her in a regular voice when you're out of sight. Does she notice? Understand what you've said? With babies, check to see that they turn their heads in response to gentle noises. Your pediatrician can refer you to an audiologist for a proper screening if you have lingering concerns.

Further reading

- *Beyond Baby Talk*, by Kenn Apel and Julie Masterson
- *Does My Child Have a Speech Problem?* by Katherine L. Martin
- *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, by Helen Lester

Ages & Stages of Language Development

As with any developmental guidelines, these are merely ballparks. We recommend you refer to our Active Learning Brochures for more detailed information, particularly for the 18—36 month period.

6 MONTHS	12 MONTHS	18 MONTHS	24 MONTHS	3 YEARS
Vocalizes with some inflection; Responds to own name; Responds to human voices without visual cues by turning head and eyes; Responds to friendly and angry tones.	Uses one or more words with meaning (may be a fragment word); Understands simple instructions, especially with vocal or visual cues; Practices inflection; Is aware of the social value of speech.	Has a vocabulary of 5-20 words; Vocabulary is mostly nouns; Some repetition of favorite words or sounds; Much "babbling" with emotional content; Able to follow simple commands.	Can name common objects; Vocabulary of approx. 150-300 words; Two-word sentences; Rhythm and fluency are often poor; Volume, pitch of voice not well controlled; Begins to use pronouns and prepositions.	Uses some pronouns; Uses some plurals and past tenses; Knows main body parts or can point to them; 3+ word sentences; Can answer simple questions; Vocabulary of 900-1000 words.
4 YEARS	5 YEARS	6 YEARS	7 YEARS	8 YEARS
Much repetition of words and phrases; Can name objects in pictures or books; Uses prepositions; Narrates own activities; Most vowels, and <i>p, b, m, w, n</i> are well-established. Can follow commands without visual cues.	Uses descriptive words spontaneously; Speech on the whole should be grammatically correct; Uses long, compound, and complex sentences; Has all the vowel sounds and <i>m, p, b, h, w, k, g, t, d, n, ng, y</i> .	In addition to previous, should master <i>f, v, sh, zh, th, l</i> ; Speech should be completely intelligible and socially useful; Should be able to tell a connected story about a picture, seeing relationships between objects and happenings.	Should master the consonants <i>s-z, r</i> , voiceless <i>th, ch, wh</i> , and the soft <i>g</i> ; Uses complex and compound sentences easily; Can understand simple analogies and opposites; Should be able to sound out simple words and print or write many words.	Should relate involved accounts of events, past and present; Can carry on a conversation at a mature level; Social amenities should be present in speech, in appropriate situations; Control of rate, pitch, and volume of speech should be well-established.

Frequently Asked Questions

Sometimes my child tunes me out. What can I do? This is usually more of a behavior issue than a speech and language problem. Make your child responsible for listening better. Say her name to get her attention, say what you need to **once**, and let her have consequences. If you sense that your child has problems processing questions or directions, **practice listening skills**. State directions simply, then ask your child to tell you what she'll do. Ask if she understands what you want. Help her break problems down into several steps. Reward her efforts with your tone of voice!

My two-year old stutters. I don't want him to have this problem in school. How can I break the habit? For children under 7 or 8 years old, their tongues can't always keep up with their brains. Try not to finish his sentences or correct his speech. He has a lot to manage just conveying his thoughts and needs. Stuttering is also

exacerbated by pressure to perform. It's completely normal for preschool children to stutter, and usually disappears without intervention. Our best advice for you is to **relax**.

My four year old tells fibs all the time. There's no reason to discourage a healthy imagination. You might try disinterested skepticism: "Did you really eat twelve pieces of pizza? What did the other kids eat?" For issues of discipline, try not to ask questions that encourage her to lie. Saying, "Did you break this vase?" gives her the option to lie. Try: "I see the vase broke. Did that happen when you were jumping?"

Do girls talk sooner than boys? In general, yes. Second children also tend to talk later. Average milestones take those factors into consideration. It's important to remember that children develop *all* skills at different speeds.