

Speech and Language Milestones Typical Children, Birth to Age 5

Most children's physical development follows a predictable pattern as they grow. Language development and their ability to understand others (receptive language) and talk (expressive language) also follows a predictable pattern.

What Are Speech and Language Milestones?

Speech and language milestones mark significant stages in a typical child's communication development.

How Are Speech and Language Milestones Used?

Gillette speech and language pathologists use milestones to guide observations about how your child compares to other typical children. We use the information as a guideline to describe your child's abilities, delays and other developmental characteristics.

What Should a Typical Child Be Able to Do?

The Speech and Language Milestones tables below show what typical children who speak a single language should be able to do at each milestone. Most children don't master all milestones in a category until they reach the upper age in each range. Remember: Every child is unique and these milestones are one tool speech and language pathologists use to document development.

What Can I Expect if My Child Is Bilingual?

Bilingual children develop language skills as other children do, but there might be differences during some stages of the process. We encourage you to use the language(s) of your home with your child. For more information, go online to: www.asha.org/public/speech/development/bilingualchildren

Speech and Language Milestones

Birth to 3 Months

Receptive (Understanding)

Expressive (Talking)

- Startles to loud sounds
- Quiets or smiles when spoken to
- Seems to recognize your voice and quiets if crying
- Increases or decreases sucking behavior in response to sound
- Makes pleasure sounds, such as cooing or gooing
- Cries differently for different needs
- Smiles when seeing you

4 to 6 Months

Receptive (Understanding)

- Moves eyes in direction of sounds
- Responds to changes in tone of your voice
- Notices toys that make sounds
- Pays attention to music

Expressive (Talking)

- Sounds more speech-like when babbling, with many different sounds, including p, b and m (English speakers)
- Chuckles and giggles
- Vocalizes excitement and displeasure
- Makes gurgling sounds when left alone and when playing with you

7 Months to 1 Year

Receptive (Understanding)

- Enjoys games like peek-o-boo and pat-a-cake
- Turns and looks in direction of sounds
- Listens when spoken to
- Recognizes words for common items such as cup, shoe, book or juice
- Begins to respond to requests, such as "Come here" or "Want more?"

Expressive (Talking)

- During babbling, uses long and short groups of sounds, such as "tata," "upup" or "bibibibi"
- Uses speech or non-crying sounds to get and keep attention
- Uses gestures to communicate, such as waving or holding out arms to be picked up
- Imitates different speech sounds
- Speaks one or two words around the first birthday, such as "hi," "dog," "dada" or "mama," but sounds might not be clear

1 to 2 Years

Receptive (Understanding)

- Points to a few body parts when asked
- Follows simple commands and understands simple questions, such as “Roll the ball,” “Kiss the baby” or “Where’s your shoe?”
- Listens to simple stories, songs and rhymes
- Points to pictures in a book when pictured items are named

Expressive (Talking)

- Says more words every month
- Uses some one- or two-word questions, such as “Where kitty?” “Go bye-bye?” or “What’s that?”
- Puts two words together, such as “more cookie,” “no juice” or “mommy book”
- Uses many different consonant sounds at the beginning of words

2 to 3 Years

Receptive (Understanding)

- Understands differences in meaning, such as go/stop, in/on, big/little or up/down
- Follows two requests at the same time, such as “Get the book and put it on the table.”
- Listens to and enjoys hearing stories for longer periods of time

Expressive (Talking)

- Has a word for almost everything
- Uses two or three words to talk about and ask for things
- Uses k, g, f, t, d and n sounds (English speakers)
- When speaking, is usually understood by familiar listeners
- Often asks for or directs attention to objects by naming them

3 to 4 Years

Receptive (Understanding)

- Hears when you call from another room
- Hears television or radio at the same loudness level as other family members
- Answers simple who, what, where and why questions

Expressive (Talking)

- Talks about activities at school or friends' homes
- Uses many sentences that have four or more words
- Usually talks easily without repeating syllables or words
- When speaking, is usually understood by people outside the family

4 to 5 Years

Receptive (Understanding)

- Pays attention to a short story and answers simple questions about them
- Hears and understands most of what is said at home and in school

Expressive (Talking)

- Uses sentences that give lots of details, such as
- "The biggest peach is mine."
- Tells stories that stick to topic
- Communicates easily with other children and adults
- Says most sounds correctly except a few, such as l, s, r, v,
z, ch, sh and th (English speakers)
- Says rhyming words
- Names some letters and numbers
- Uses the same grammar as the rest of the family

Source: The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

Resources

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

- www.asha.org/public/speech/development/chart

This ASHA webpage provides details on how your child hears and talks. It also gives the same information in Spanish.

- www.asha.org/slp/schools/prof-consult/norms

This is an online packet of resources about norms for speech and language development.

Help Me Grow

1-866-698-4769 (GROW)

Minnesota's early intervention system — Help Me Grow — includes two programs for eligible children. Eligible children can receive services in their home, school or child care setting. Services are free to children regardless of income or immigrant status.

Questions?

Please contact your pediatrician or Gillette health care provider, or call Gillette at 651-229-3900 and ask for a speech and language pathology clinical educator or a speech and language pathology supervisor.

Make An Appointment

[651-290-8707](tel:651-290-8707)

Refer a Patient

[651-325-2200](tel:651-325-2200)

This information is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care providers. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or others on your health care team.

If you are a Gillette patient with urgent questions or concerns, please contact Telehealth Nursing at [651-229-3890](tel:651-229-3890).