

Speech & Language Milestones

A parent-friendly guide for understanding communication development from birth through age 5.

A note for parents

Milestones are ranges, not deadlines. Children develop at different rates, and one missed skill does not automatically mean a child has a speech or language disorder. Look at the overall pattern of communication, progress over time, and your child's unique strengths.

Birth to 12 Months

Age / stage	Communication skills you may notice
0–3 months	Alerts to sounds; quiets or smiles when spoken to; makes sounds back and forth; begins cooing.
4–6 months	Giggles and laughs; responds to facial expressions; watches interesting objects; vocalizes during play.
7–9 months	Babbles with longer strings of sounds; responds to their name; uses vocalizations and gestures to engage.
10–12 months	Points, waves, shows or gives objects; imitates sounds or actions; understands familiar words and routines.

13 Months to 2 Years

Age / stage	Communication skills you may notice
13–18 months	Follows familiar one-step directions; looks for named objects; uses gestures and words to request or comment.
19–24 months	Combines two or more words; understands more words than they can say; begins using words for actions, people, and objects.

Speech & Language Milestones: Ages 2–5

As children grow, communication becomes more flexible, detailed, and social. These are broad developmental guides rather than pass/fail standards.

Age / stage	Communication skills you may notice
2–3 years	Uses word combinations often; begins using pronouns and simple grammatical forms; follows increasingly complex directions; asks simple questions; familiar listeners can understand much of what the child says.
3–4 years	Uses longer sentences; tells about experiences or stories; compares objects; answers a wider range of questions; participates in conversations; speech is becoming easier for unfamiliar listeners to understand.
4–5 years	Uses longer, more complex sentences; tells organized stories; understands and uses location and time words; follows rules for games; produces most consonants correctly and is generally understandable in conversation.

Speech and Language Are Related — But Not the Same

Speech refers to how we produce sounds and words. This can include articulation (individual speech sounds), phonology (patterns of sounds), motor speech, fluency, and voice.

Language is the system we use to understand and express meaning. It includes vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, following directions, answering questions, storytelling, conversation, and using language socially.

When to look beyond a single milestone

Consider talking with your pediatrician and/or an SLP if your child is not gaining new communication skills, has difficulty across several areas, loses skills they previously had, is difficult for familiar or unfamiliar listeners to understand, or you simply have ongoing concerns. You do not need to wait for a problem to become severe before asking questions.

Easy Ways to Support Communication at Home

- Talk about what your child is doing and seeing during everyday routines.
- Follow your child's interests and join their play instead of directing every moment.
- Pause after you speak so your child has time to respond.
- Model slightly more language than your child currently uses. If they say "car," try "fast car" or "red car."
- Read together and talk about pictures, characters, actions, and what might happen next.
- Use the language or languages you are most comfortable speaking with your child.

A Simple Parent Check-In

Use these questions to notice patterns in your child's communication. You do not need to check every box for development to be healthy.

- My child is showing steady progress over time.
- My child communicates wants, needs, interests, or feelings in some way.
- My child understands familiar language and routines appropriate for their age.
- My child is learning new words, gestures, sounds, or communication strategies.
- My child can participate in some type of back-and-forth interaction.
- My child's speech is becoming easier to understand as they grow.
- My child can communicate with familiar people in ways that are meaningful to them.
- I feel comfortable with my child's progress — or I know what my next question is.

Remember

Your child does not have to “earn” support by being far behind. Parent concerns are important information. An SLP can help you understand what is going well, what may need support, and what next steps make sense for your family.

Bloom Pediatric Speech Therapy, Inc. • Parent education resource

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