

Speech and language development checklists

Adapted from Communication Trust “Universally Speaking”

0-5 years

By 6 months, babies will usually:

- Make sounds, like cooing, gurgling and babbling, to themselves and with other people
- Make noises to get your attention
- Watch your face when you talk to them
- Get excited when they hear voices coming, showing their excitement by kicking or waving their arms or making noises
- Smile and laugh when other people smile and laugh
- Make sounds back when talked to

By 1 year, babies will usually:

Talking:

- Make talking noises - babble strings of sounds, like ‘ma-ma-ma’, ‘ba-ba-ba’; point and look at you to get your attention
- Many, though not all 1 year olds, will be saying their first words and they may also use gestures

Listening:

- Start to understand words like ‘bye-bye’ and ‘up’ especially when a gesture is used at the same time
- Recognise the names of familiar objects, things like ‘cup’ and ‘bowl’, ‘teddy’ and ‘mummy’

Taking part:

- Look at you when you speak or when they hear their name called
- Take turns in ‘conversations’, babbling back and forth

By 18 months, babies will usually:

Talking:

- Be talking! They will be able to say around 20 words. These are usually things they hear a lot at home or in the setting – such as ‘milk’, ‘doggy’, ‘hurrah’, ‘bye-bye’, ‘more’, ‘no’
- Say words in a baby way, but the words are usually consistent in how they sound

Listening:

- Understand some simple words and short phrases. These are usually things they hear a lot during the day, such as 'coat on', 'drink', 'shoes', 'bus', 'in your buggy', 'dinner time', 'all gone'
- Recognise and point to familiar objects when you ask them

Taking part:

- Enjoy games like 'peek-a-boo' and 'pat-a-cake' and toys that make a noise – they still like the comfort of a familiar adult near by
- Be exploring their world and starting to enjoy simple pretend play, like pretending to talk on the phone

By 2 years, toddlers will usually:

Talking:

- Use over 50 single words like 'juice', 'car', 'biscuit'
- Be starting to put short phrases together with two to three words, such as "more juice" or "bye-bye daddy"
- Be asking simple questions such as "what that?", "who that?". They might do this quite a lot!

Listening:

- Understand between 200 and 500 words
- Understand simple questions and instructions like "where's baby", "go and get your coat", "mummy's turn"

Taking part:

- Enjoy pretend play with their toys, such as feeding dolly or pretending to drive a car, usually making noises and talking while playing
- Become very frustrated when they cannot get their message across. This is one reason for toddler tantrums

By 3 years, children will usually:

Talking:

- Use up to 300 words. They will use different types of words to do different things, e.g. to describe what things look like
 - 'big', 'soft'
 - where they are – 'under', 'on'
 - what they are for – 'eating', 'playing'
 - that say who they are – 'me'
 - to describe how many - 'lots'
- Refer to something that has happened in the past

- Put 4 or 5 words together to make short sentences, such as “me want more juice”, “him want his coat”
- Ask lots of questions
- Have clearer speech, although they will still have some immaturities such as ‘pider’ instead of ‘spider’. They often have problems saying more difficult sounds like ‘sh’, ‘ch’, ‘th’ and ‘r’. Some children at this age will not yet be using sounds such as ‘k’, ‘g’, ‘s’, ‘z’, ‘f’ and ‘v’, though they should develop during the year they are 3. However, people who know them can mostly understand them

Listening:

- Listen to and remember simple stories with pictures
- Understand longer instructions, such as “put on your coat and get your bag” or “where’s mummy’s coat?”
- Understand simple ‘who’, ‘what’, and ‘where’ questions

Taking part:

- Play more with other children and join in with play
- Play more complex imaginative games
- Be able to have a proper conversation, though they may flit around the topic a bit and be difficult to follow at times
- Be able to recognise how other people feel and will try to do something about it, e.g “Ah, Josie sad. She need a hug.”

By 4 years, children will usually:

Talking:

- Ask lots of questions using words like ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘why’
- Be able to answer questions about ‘why’ something has happened
- Use longer sentences and link sentences together, e.g. “I had pizza for tea and then I played in the garden”
- Describe events that have already happened, E.g. “We got dressed up and we went to the hall and singed songs. All the mummies and daddies did watch”
- Have mostly clear speech, though will continue to have difficulties with a small number of sounds – for example ‘r’ – as in ‘rabbit’, ‘l’ – as in ‘letter’, ‘th’ as in ‘thumb’, ‘sh’ as in ‘show’, and ‘j’ as in ‘jam’. Words with clusters of sounds such as ‘st’, ‘sl’, ‘sp’ will often be unclear at this point

Listening:

- Listen to longer stories and answer questions about a story they have just heard, for example, simple questions such as “Who did Cinderella dance with at the ball?”, “Were Cinderella’s sisters kind?”
- Understand and often use colour, number and time related words, for example, ‘red’ car, ‘three’ fingers

Taking part:

- Use talking to meet new friends and work out problems
- Enjoy make-believe play
- Start to like simple jokes – though often their own jokes make little sense
- Start to be able to plan games with others

By 5 years, children will usually:**Talking:**

- Take turns in much longer conversations
- Use sentences that are well formed, for example, “I had spaghetti for tea at Jamilia’s house”
- Be learning more words all the time as well as thinking more about the meanings of words, such as describing the meaning of simple words or asking what a new word means
- Be able to re-tell short stories they have heard in roughly the right order and using language that makes it sound like a story
- Use most speech sounds. However, they may have some difficulties with more difficult words such as ‘scribble’ or ‘elephant’. Some speech sounds such as ‘r’, ‘th’, and clusters of sounds such as ‘sl’, ‘pr’, ‘tw’, ‘sk’, may still be difficult

Listening:

- Enjoy listening to stories, songs and rhymes and will start to make up their own
- Ask relevant questions or make relevant comments in relation to what they have heard
- Understand spoken instructions without stopping what they are doing to look at the speaker
- Understand more complicated language such as ‘first’, ‘last’, ‘might’, ‘maybe’, ‘above’ and ‘in between’
- Understand words that describe sequences such as “first we are going to the shop, next we will play in the park”

Taking part:

- Choose their own friends
- Use talk to take on different roles in imaginative play, to interact and negotiate with people and to have longer conversations
- Use talk to help work out problems, to organise their thinking and take part in activities