

Speech and Language Milestones

Why are Speech and Language Milestones Important?

Speech and language milestones provide a guide to how children's communication skills typically develop. Children grow at different rates, but understanding what skills usually emerge at each age helps staff and parents recognise when a child may need additional support.

Milestones are guidelines, not strict checklists.

0-2 years: Early Foundations

Children develop the foundations for communication through interaction and play.

Children may:

- Makes eye contact and responds to name.
- Uses gestures (pointing / waving).
- Understands familiar words.
- Uses single words.
- Begins combining two words.

Consider seeking advice if:

- Limited eye contact or information
- Not responding to their name
- Not using words by 18-24 months

2-3 years: Rapid Language Growth

Children's vocabulary grows quickly and they begin to use language more intentionally.

Children may:

- Use 2-3 words sentences.
- Follow simple instructions.
- Name familiar objects and people

Consider seeking advice if:

- Very limited vocabulary
- Difficulty understanding simple language
- Frequent frustration when communicating



3-4 years: Expanding Sentences

Children may:

- Uses longer sentences
- Ask simple questions
- Understand basic concepts (big/small, in/on)
- Enjoys stories and rhymes
- Be understood by most people

Consider seeking advice if:

- Speech is very unclear
- Struggles to follow instructions
- Difficulty forming sentences

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4-5 years: Ready for Learning

By this age, children use language to support learning, social interaction and emotional regulation.

- Tell simple stories
- Follow two- to three-step instructions
- Understand and answer “why” and “how” questions
- Use language to problem solve
- Be understood by unfamiliar listeners

Consider seeking advice if:

- Ongoing difficulty understanding classroom language
- Difficulty expressing ideas clearly
- Limited sentence structure
- Difficulty interacting with peers

5-7 years: Developing Language of Learning

Children may:

- Retell stories in logical order with key details
- Use longer sentences with joining words (because, when, if)
- Learn and use new topic-specific vocabulary
- Participate in small group and whole-class discussions

Consider seeking advice if:

- Answers are very brief, unclear or off-topic
- Difficulty retelling events in order
- Limited vocabulary compared to peers
- Literacy progress is affected by language understanding

7-9 years: Expanding Vocabulary and Reasoning

Children may:

- Follow longer and more detailed instructions
- Understand simple figurative language
- Use increasingly precise, subject-specific vocabulary
- Summarise key information from stories or lessons

Consider seeking advice if:

- Difficulty explaining reasoning or justifying answers
- Frequent misunderstanding of questions
- Struggles with reading comprehension despite good decoding
- Difficulty organising spoken explanations

Important: Language underpins learning.

If a child consistently struggles to understand, process or use language, this may impact their academic progress, confidence and relationships.

Early identification and support can make a significant difference.

