

Normal Language Development: 12 to 36 Months

Communication is important for daily living. It forms the basis for social and emotional development, and for learning. Children communicate verbally by developing speech (also called articulation) and language skills. Here are some helpful definitions:

- **Speech** (articulation): the physical production of sounds to form spoken words.
- **Language**: the message that is sent back and forth during talking. This includes understanding the speech of others (receptive language) and using words and sentences to convey a message (expressive language). It also includes using language for social reasons (pragmatics).

Although all children are a little different in their development of speech and language, the following are typical skills that are developed at each stage:

12 to 18 Months

Understanding

- Pays attention to a book or toy for at least two minutes
- Points to pictures in a book or body parts when named
- Can point to or get many objects when asked
- Easily follows simple commands, such as “Get the cup” and “Touch your nose.”
- Listens to simple stories, songs and rhymes
- Listens more closely to others

Talking

- Says “no” and shakes head for “no”
- Asks for more
- Repeats animal sounds
- Says family and pet names
- Names familiar objects and pictures in books
- Repeats words on command
- Uses many single words by the end of this period
- Mixes jargon, gestures, and words to communicate
- Uses single words to mean many things. For example, the word “cup” may mean “I want a drink,” “That’s a cup” or “Where’s my cup?”



Socializing

- Enjoys rhymes and finger-play games (i.e., Itsy-Bitsy Spider)
- Repeats other children’s sounds
- Hugs dolls, animals, and other people
- Pretends to feed others

18 to 24 Months

Understanding

- Likes being read to
- Understands the names of everyday objects
- Understands many describing words (“big” versus “little”), action words (“eat” or “run”) and pronouns (“I,” “him,” “her”)
- Begins to understand words in the same group (i.e., animal includes dog and cat)
- Follows two-step commands (i.e., “Go in your room and bring me a book.”) and harder commands (i.e., “Give me the big ball.”)
- Is interested in how things work

Talking

- Uses less jargon and more true words
- Uses different tones of voice for statements and questions
- Uses more speech sounds, such as /f/, /s/ and /sh/
- Has at least 50 words in his or her vocabulary
- Begins to use pronouns (“me,” “I,” “mine”)
- Uses some descriptive words, such as “hot,” “big,” “good,” etc.
- Repeats two and three word phrases
- Begins to put two and three words together spontaneously, such as “Mommy go,” “Nice doggie,” or “More juice”
- Tries to tell you about something that has happened
- Uses his or her own name

Socializing

- Starts to take turns in conversation
- Uses words to ask for things, ask for help, answer questions, and make comments

24 to 30 Months

Understanding

- Understands longer, harder sentences such as “When we get to the store, we’ll get some ice cream”
- Understands routines. For example, she gets her shoes and coat when you say “We’re going to the store”

Talking

- Talks using short sentences
- Sentences are often “telegraphic.” For example, “Doggie sleep outside”
- Responds to some wh-questions
- Often talks to him or herself during play
- Typically uses the present tense (i.e., The dog sleeps.)

- Can tell about some feelings
- Sometimes uses /-ing/ and plural /-s/ word endings, and prepositions
- Speech is usually understood by family members

Socializing

- Uses imagination to pretend during play
- Plays alongside and with others
- Imitates the order of actions within household routines, like washing dishes, drying them, and putting them away

30 to 36 Months

Understanding

- Understands the names of most people and objects in familiar environments
- Understands common verbs, common adjectives, and prepositions
- Understands how objects in the environment work together
- Understands questions using “who,” “what,” “where,” “why,” and “how”
- Understands concepts, including spatial (behind, under, and next to), comparative (bigger and longer), and number (one, many) concepts
- Follows 3-step directions (i.e. “Open the bag, get the bear, and give it to Mommy”)
- Enjoys listening to stories
- Understands indirect language (for example, the concept of “later”)

Talking

- Creates longer and more complex sentences
- Makes some mistakes in grammar, particularly regularizing irregular forms (i.e., “feets”)
- Can link sentences together with “and” and “because”
- Can describe recent events
- Continues to talk to him or herself to more clearly understand things
- Uses questions to get information

Socializing

- Uses questions to get information
- Understands some “conversational rules,” such as ways to start and end a conversation
- Reacts to comments and requests of other speakers
- Uses role-playing during pretend and imaginative play
- Sometimes involves other people in pretend play
- Uses words to show emotions, needs, and difficulties
- Speech is understandable to all listeners, although some sounds (i.e. /l, r, th/) may be produced incorrectly

For more information, please contact the Division of Speech-Language Pathology at (513) 636-4341 or visit our website at www.cincinnatichildrens.org/speech.