



# Speech, language and communication development

A general guide to children's communication abilities up to five years old

Age	Attention	Understanding	Talking
12 months	Shows signs of 'listening' when spoken to – quietyens, turns and watches	Recognises own name Understands 'no' Understands some everyday words – bye, dinner, mum	Uses gestures like pointing, waving Talks nonsense to self sounds like speech May use some words
18 months	Listens to and carries out simple instructions – 'get your shoes'	Points to familiar objects when asked –'where's the ball' Points to body parts when asked	Knows uses and says different words Tries to copy new words
2 years	Can concentrate on an activity they have chosen, but can't tolerate directions from an adult	Acts on simple commands 'kick the ball to mum' Listens to simple stories with pictures	Can use at least 20 words Beginning to join two words together Asks questions Tries to copy new words
2½ years	Can concentrate for longer on chosen activity but cannot continue with activity and listen to adult at same time	Understanding mainly in 'here and now' Follows simple stories	Beginning to use three words together Doesn't use little words like 'and' and 'the'
3 years	Can stop activity to listen to directions from an adult but needs help to do this (eg calling name)	Understands words such as 'in', 'on', 'under' and some describing words such as 'big', 'wet' Can answer 'what' and 'who' questions	Uses sentences of four words Talks about past events words like 'runned' and 'was'
4 years	Can change focus of attention without help but still needs to stop activity to be able to listen	Understands past and future (yesterday and tomorrow)	Uses complete sentences words such as 'because' Can still use words like 'and' Asks why and when
5 years	Can concentrate and listen at the same time but may need occasional help	Understands opposites Understands words like 'near', 'in between'	Uses longer sentences Can tell simple stories Can explain meanings of simple words

## Communication abilities up to five years old

	Speech sounds	Social interaction and play
Pointing, Self which s	Lots of babbling using different sounds, eg ba-da-ba	Makes eye contact Smiles at familiar people Waves goodbye Enjoys games like round and round the garden Shows affection to parents
s at least 10 ords	Words are not pronounced clearly	Uses objects and toys appropriately Plays simple pretend play Will draw adults attention to something Wants to communicate
ords vo words	Can't always be understood Back sounds (k/g) not used Long sounds (f/s/sh) not used	Takes turns in conversation Pretend play with dolls etc Joins in with action songs
ords ree words ords like 'is'	Can't always be understood Back sounds (k/g) not used Long sounds (f/s/sh) not used	Joins in rhymes and songs Watches others at play and may join in or copy Tries to get adult attention Talks to other children as well as adults
our to five nts but uses and 'goed'	Mainly intelligible but still struggles with some sounds such as 'ch', 'j', 'k/g', 'th' and 'r' Simplifies two sounds together 'pease' for 'please' and 'boon' for 'spoon'	Uses peoples names to get their attention Can pretend an object is something else, eg a brick is a car Understands activity in pictures
ences with use' like 'runned' questions	Speech intelligible but some sounds immature	Plays games with simple rules Plays pretend games with other children Uses threats, insults, promises and praise
es es g of some	Speech is easy to understand but may still use 'f' for 'th' and 'w' for 'r'	Can play in groups Uses language for many purposes, eg to gain information, express feelings

## You may want to talk to someone if:

- your child is not saying many words at 18 months to two years;
- your child is difficult to understand at three years;
- your child is not joining two or more words together by two and a half to three years;
- you have a family history or other children with speech and language difficulties;
- you think your child may not be hearing well or has had lots of ear infections;
- your child doesn't seem interested in communicating with you or finds it difficult.

For more ideas, information or informal advice on helping your child, please contact the Early Communication Team through your local children's centre.

### Children's centre details

County Hall, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 1UD

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**SureStart**

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