

Normal Language Development: Birth to 12 Months

Communication is important for daily living, including learning information and getting along with others. Children learn to communicate by developing speech (also called articulation) and language skills. Here are some helpful definitions:

- **Speech** (Articulation): making 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 the expressing ourselves through words and sentences (expressive language). It also includes using language for social reasons (pragmatics).

Although all children are a little different in their development, speech and language skills usually occur in this way:

Birth to 3 Months

Understanding

- Is startled by loud sounds
- May stop sucking for a few seconds when they hear a sound
- Smiles or moves when someone speaks
- Watches the speaker's face closely
- Is aware of different voices
- Calms down when they hear a parent's voice



Talking

- Begins to coo (cooing is making random vowel sounds)
- Makes "happy" sounds, which may include an occasional laugh
- Cries and fusses for attention and to have needs met
- Begins to use different cries to communicate different messages (i.e., I'm wet, cold, hungry, tired, etc.).
- Makes sounds when people interact with them
- Makes sounds when talked to

Socializing

- Begins to look into people's eyes
- Watches faces when people speak
- Smiles and laughs
- Shows interest in people
- Likes to be held

3 to 6 Months

Understanding

- Looks towards a voice or sound
- Likes toys that make sound
- Recognizes own name and some words
- Pays attention to music

Talking

- Takes turns making sounds with a caregiver
- Makes cooing and gurgling sounds when alone
- Becomes louder and raises or lowers voice while cooing
- Makes different sounds to show pleasure or displeasure
- Learns to communicate for something he or she wants--for example, wanting more to eat--by simply making a sound

Socializing

- Copies facial expressions
- Uses sounds to ask for “more”
- Takes turns making sounds with other people
- Is scared of strangers
- Smiles at family members

6 to 9 Months

Understanding

- Stops or turns when his or her name is called
- Recognizes family and pet names
- Understands a few common words
- Pays attention when spoken to
- Looks at pictures
- Pays attention to music
- Responds to “no” or to a change in tone of voice
- Begins to follow simple commands when someone gestures (i.e., “Come here.”)



Talking

- Babbles using certain sounds like /b/, /m/, /w/, /d/, /n/, and /g/. Babbling consists of syllables repeated over and over (i.e., ma ma ma ma, da da da da)
- Makes noise at self in mirror, during play and with music
- Begins to ask for things by reaching and making sounds
- Takes turns copying sounds and syllables (i.e., “ba”) with the caregiver

Socializing

- Copies actions and plays games, such as peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake
- Waves to say “bye-bye”
- Becomes more interactive.
- Seems to have his or her own personality

9-12 Months

Understanding

- Understands a few more words (including words for body parts) and common objects
- Follows simple commands, like “Give me your shoe”
- Begins to understand the tone of your voice (i.e., “mad” tone versus “happy” tone)

Talking

- Begins to point and gesture more often to show what he or she wants
- Tries again when he can’t be understood the first time
- Imitates new sounds and syllables
- Says “Uh-oh!”
- Uses less babbling and more Jargon. Jargon is combination of different sounds and syllables that sound like “jibber-jabber,” such as “badidodiga”
- May begin to use a few real words

Socializing

- Waves more often for “hi” and “bye-bye”
- Wants to play simple games
- Starts talking and playing with others and moves away when finished

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