

Normal Language Development: 12 to 36 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:

12 to 18 Months

Understanding

- Pays attention to a book or toy for about 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 when asked
- Uses many single words by t18 months of age
- 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 almost all 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., dog is an animal)
- Follows 2-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 “why” and “how” things work

Talking

- Uses less jargon and more real 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, 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 more complex questions (i.e., what/where)
- Often talks to him or herself to practice putting words together
- Uses 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 others
- Imitates the order of actions within household routines, like washing dishes, drying them, and putting them away.

30-36 Months

Understanding

- Understands the names of almost all people and objects in familiar environments; common verbs, common adjectives, and prepositions
- Understands how objects in the environment work together
- Understands questions using “who,” “what,” “where,” “why,” and “how”
- Understands spatial (behind, under, next to), comparative (bigger, longer), and number (one, many) concepts
- Can follow 3-step directions, such as “Open the bag, take out 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
- Still makes some mistakes in grammar
- Can link sentences together with “and” and “because”
- Can describe recent events in his/her life
- Continues to talk to him or herself to more clearly understand things
- Uses questions to get information

Socializing

- Understands some “conversational rules,” such as ways to start and end a conversation
- Thinks about who she is talking to in conversations
- 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 sometimes a few errors happen

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