

Children's Speech and Language Development

Introduction

This fact sheet outlines the stages of development which most children go through when they are developing speech and language skills. By reading this fact sheet, families of deaf children will have a better understanding of how children's speech and language develops.

What is the difference between speech and language?

Language is the words, thoughts and concepts we have in our minds. Speech is one way in which we convey our language to other people. We can also convey our language through sign language or writing. Almost all learning depends on language. Children find learning in school easier if they have well developed language skills.

What are the stages of development most children go through when they acquire speech sounds?

Below is a *summary* of speech development in children.

Age	What sounds children can say
0 to 12 months	Children experiment with all sounds though babbling Most children consistently use vowel sounds
1 to 2 years	Children can say the vowel sounds, /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/ and /u/ in words and they can say /m/, /b/ and /d/
2 to 3 years	Children can say /p/, /n/, /ng/ and /h/ in words
3 to 4 years	Children can say /w/, /y/ and /t/ in words
4 to 6 years	Children can say /k/, /g/, /f/, /l/, /sh/, /ch/, /j/, /s/ and /z/ in words
6 to 8 years	Children can say /v/, /r/ and they can blend all sounds together in words
8 years	Most children are accurate 99% of time for all speech sounds for all words

Reference: Wide Bay Region Speech Therapy 1993

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What is articulation?

Articulation refers to the movements we make with our lips, soft palate, lips and tongue when we speak. Some children may have difficulty in articulation some speech sounds and may need more time or assistance from a speech pathologist to learn how to articulate specific speech sounds.

What stages do children go through to acquire language?

All children go through the same stages when they acquire language skills. Below is a *summary* of the development of language skills in children.

0 to 12 months	By 1 to 2 years
<p>The child will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to speech • Respond to different aspects of a speaker's voice • Respond with gesture • Stop on-going action when told 'no.' • Name or look for object out of sight • Begin to understand concepts such as top, bottom, up, down etc 	<p>The child will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond correctly when asked 'where' • Understand prepositions such as 'on', 'in', 'under'. • Follow requests to bring familiar objects from another room • Understand simple phrases • Follow a series of two simple directions • Can ask for 'more' • Says 'no.' • Says simple two word sentences, mostly nouns
By 2 to 3 years	By 3 to 4 years
<p>The child will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point to pictures of common objects • Identify objects when told their use • Understand question forms: 'what', 'where', 'who'. Sometimes understand 'why.' • Understand 'no', 'not', 'can't', 'won't' and 'don't' • Enjoy listening to simple stories and requests them again • Uses pronouns, 'I', 'me', 'you', 'mine' 	<p>The child will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to understand sentences involving concepts of time, eg, 'tomorrow' • Understand size, eg, 'big, bigger and biggest' • Understand concepts such as 'if', 'then' and 'because' • Carry out 2 to 4 related directions • Understand 'let's pretend' • Start to use 'was' and 'were' • Uses 'got'

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By 4 to 5 years	By 5 to 6 years
<p>The child will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow three unrelated commands in their proper order • Understand comparatives, eg, 'pretty, prettier, prettiest'. • Listen to long stories • Understand sequences • Begin to respond to questions that require reasoning 	<p>The child will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate pre-academic skills • Have complex conversations • Re-tell a story • Show development of abstract time concepts

From: Estabrooks and Louwerse. 1980.
North York General Hospital from Word Making Productions.
Salt Lake City, Utah.

Do all children go through the same stages when developing speech and language skills?

Yes, all children will progressively move through the same stages when acquiring articulation skills. Some children may need more time than others to acquire specific speech and language skills.

How many words do most children know?

- By one to two years, a child will use around 50 recognisable words, but they will understand about 300.
- By two to three years, a child will use about 500 recognisable words, but they will understand about 900.
- By three to four years, a child will use about 800 to 1,500 words but they will understand about 1,500 to 2,000.
- By school age, a child will know and use over 2,000 words and understand around 5,000.

How long are most children's sentences?

- By one year of age, a child will use one word sentences
- By two years of age, a child will use 2 word sentences or more
- By three years of age, a child will use 2.5 to 3 words per sentence or more
- By four years of age, a child will use between 4 and 6 words in a sentence or more

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What are the different parts of language?

You may have heard your child's teacher of the deaf, speech pathologist or other person talk about language structures. Language is structured into:

Syntax (commonly called grammar): this is how sentences are put together. All languages follow rules and if a child is having difficulties with syntax, it means the child does not fully understand the rules of how sentences are put together.

Morphology: these are the small units added to the beginning and ends of words, eg, 'un' as in 'unpleasant', 'ir' as in 'irresponsible' 'ed' as in 'jumped' 'ing' as in 'jumping'. If a child is having difficulty with morphology, it means they are not using or understanding these small units properly.

Semantics: this is the meaning of words. If a child is having trouble with semantics, it means they do not know or understand enough words or are using the wrong words in their sentences which makes their sentences incorrect or hard to understand.

Phonology: This refers to the sounds to speech. If a child is having problems with phonology, it means they have problems with their articulation of speech sounds.

Pragmatics: This refers to the parts of language which are visual, eg, body language, facial expressions, eye contact, turn taking etc. It also refers to how we use our language. If a child has difficulties with pragmatics, it means they do not understand the non-verbal (visual) signals people use when they talk to each other.

A child needs to develop skills in all of these language areas to have full mastery of our language system.

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