



Language Development: 1 Year Olds

Early in the second year, your toddler will suddenly seem to understand everything you say. You'll announce lunchtime and he'll be waiting by his high chair. You'll tell him you've lost your shoe and he'll find it. At first, his rapid response may seem a little unusual. Did he really understand, or is this just a dream? Rest assured, it's not your imagination. He's developing his language and comprehension skills right on schedule.



This giant developmental leap probably will alter the way you now talk to him and converse with others when he's around. For example, you may edit conversations held within his earshot, perhaps spelling out words you'd rather he didn't understand (as in, "Should we stop for I-C-E-C-R-E-A-M?"). At the same time, you'll probably feel more enthusiastic about talking to him, because he's so responsive.

You may find yourself using less baby talk, no longer needing high-pitched singsong monologues to get his attention. Instead, try speaking slowly and clearly, using simple words and short sentences. Teach him the correct names of objects and body parts, and stop using cute substitutes such as "piggies" when you really mean "toes." By providing a good language model, you'll help him learn to talk with a minimum of confusion.

Most toddlers master at least fifty spoken words by the end of the second year and can put two words together to form a short sentence, although there are differences among children. Even among those with normal hearing and intelligence, some don't talk much during the second year. Boys generally develop language skills more slowly than girls. Whenever your child begins to speak, his first few words probably will include the names of familiar people, his favorite possessions, and parts of his body. You may be the only person who understands these early words, since he'll omit or change certain sounds. For example, he might get the first consonant (*b, d, t*) and vowel (*a, e, i, o, u*) sounds right, but drop the end of the word. Or he may substitute sounds he can pronounce, such as *d* or *b*, for more difficult ones.

You'll learn to understand what he's saying over time and with the help of his gestures. By all means, don't ridicule his language mistakes. Give him as much time as he needs to finish what he wants to say without hurrying, and then answer with a correct pronunciation of the word ("That's right, it's a ball!"). If you're patient and responsive, his pronunciation will improve gradually.

By midyear, he'll use a few active verbs, such as "go" and "jump," and words of direction, such as "up," "down," "in," and "out." By his second birthday, he'll have mastered the words "me" and "you" and use them all the time.

At first, he'll make his own version of a whole sentence by combining a single word with a gesture or grunt. He might point and say "ball"—his way of telling you he wants you to roll him the ball. Or he might shape a question by saying "Out?" or "Up?"—raising his voice at the end. Soon he'll begin to combine verbs or prepositions with nouns, to make statements like "Ball up" or "Drink milk," and questions like "What that?" By the end of the year, or soon thereafter, he'll begin to use two-word sentences.

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