

A Basic Language Primer for Toddlerhood

Children begin to communicate at birth. Some progress rapidly and others develop on a slow steady course. Most children reach the same ability to communicate over time. The ability to comprehend someone else's speech is called **receptive language**. The ability to create a spoken message is **expressive language**. Children understand by hearing well enough and having a caregiver who shows what words mean like hot and cold, up and down, good and bad.

At 12 to 18 months your child may:

- Understand 50 to 75 words
- Use 3 to 20 real words
- Point to known objects and some body parts
- Babble and use nonsense words while pointing
- Follow simple one-step commands
- Imitate words

Typical for this age:

"Mama"

"No"

"Daddy, doppel it" (Daddy, stop it)

"Dimme da" (give me that)

"Baw" (ball)

"Too-duh" (toothbrush)

Warning Signs:

- Avoids eye contact
- Doesn't say mama or dada
- Is quiet, rarely attempting to produce words
- Tunes out
- Does not point to common body parts when asked
- Has difficulty pointing to pictures named
- Is disinterested in talking

If your baby shows any of these signs, talk to your pediatrician or a developmental specialist. They may recommend an assessment by a qualified speech therapist or an occupational therapist. These professionals will work with parents to form a plan of intervention which may include speech or occupational therapy. Young children can and do make significant improvements with consistent intervention.

Source:

Hamaguchi, P. M. (1995). Childhood speech, language, and listening problems: What every parent should know. N.Y.: John Wiley and Sons.