

**This TelAbility handout will provide an overview of speech and language development**

## **What Is Language? What Is Speech?**

Language is a code made up of rules that include what words mean, how to make words, how to put them together, and what word combinations are best in what situations. Language is divided into two main categories: **receptive language** (understanding what is said, written or signed) and **expressive language** (speaking, writing, or signing). **Speech** is spoken language.

## **How is language learned?**

All children gradually learn language through their interactions with people and the environment. While children learn at different rates, it's important that their language develops steadily. Some may develop somewhat later and others earlier.

\* The chart on page 3 provided by the American Speech and Hearing Association shows the average age at which most children will accomplish specific speech and language skills.

## **The first four years:**

- By 12 months (more or less) most children have one or two words that they say with meaning. They also can follow simple requests (e.g., "Can I have your cup?") or commands (e.g., "Don't touch!") and understand short questions (e.g., "Where's your tummy?").
- Expect **first words** between 12 and 18 months. There will probably be a "spurt" of language development before 2 years.
- By 2 to 3 years of age your child should be able to follow two-part instructions ("Get your teddy and put it on the chair") and string two or three words together to talk about and ask for things.
- Anticipate hearing 4 to 5 word sentences by 4 years. Grammar should be correct most of the time by 4 years. "Other people" will understand almost everything your child says by 4 years.

## **Speech development**

This may sound strange, but expect your child's speech to be child-like. Children's speech does not sound like adult speech because they make typical child-like "sound replacements". These sound replacements are called phonological processes by some researchers.

## **Pragmatic skills**

Communication starts to develop in the early weeks of life, with tiny babies "turn taking", initiating communicative interchanges, and "talking" (non-verbally, of course) to their caregivers.

*Enhancing the lives of children with disabilities*

## **Speech and Language Problems: Where to go for help**

### **Professional help: Speech/Language Pathologists (SLPs)**

SLPs (also called speech therapists) are the only professionals uniquely qualified to assess, diagnose and treat communication disorders. If you are concerned about your child's speech or language progress, seek an assessment from a qualified Speech-Language Pathology professional.

See a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) without delay **if you are concerned** about your child's:

- receptive language development (understanding what is said)
- expressive language development (ability to talk in words, phrases and sentences)
- speech sound development (the clarity of their speech)
- "pragmatics" of language use (the ability and desire to communicate in an age and culturally appropriate friendly, sociable, playful and interested way)
- fluency (persistent stuttering for example)  
voice quality (for example persistent hoarseness)

### **What's typical...**

All children sometimes misunderstand what is said to them, utter oddly worded sentences, and put speech sounds in the wrong spots (or omit them) when they are learning to talk.

### **...and what's not typical**

Stuttering is not a normal part of learning to talk; children's voices should not be hoarse unless they have a cold; and if children are disinterested in communicating with other people, have poor eye-contact and are aloof with people outside the family, or usually respond to what you say by echoing all or part of it back to you word-for-word, their communications skills should be assessed.

### **If progress seems too slow:**

If "first words" have not emerged by 18 months try to spend at least half an hour a day just playing and interacting one-to-one with your baby. This can sometimes be difficult to organize, but it often does the trick! A speech pathologist can make helpful suggestions and demonstrate various activities.

### **Trust YOUR judgment**

Rely on your own judgment. If you think your child has a problem in the area of communication skills don't hesitate to seek proper professional help. Remember that you are the best expert on your own child's development and progress. The *right* time to seek help is when *you*, as a parent, are concerned. Early identification of communication difficulties in children can prevent other problems from developing, such as difficult behavior, learning difficulties (especially with reading and spelling) and problems relating to and getting along with other people. The fact is babies or toddlers are never too young for a communication skills assessment. SLPs see children from infancy on up.

Hearing and Understanding	Talking
<p><b>Birth-3 Months</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Startles to loud sounds.</li> <li>Quiets or smiles when spoken to.</li> <li>Seems to recognize your voice and quiets if crying.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Birth-3 Months</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes pleasure sounds (cooing, gooing).</li> <li>Cries differently for different needs.</li> <li>Smiles when sees you.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4-6 Months</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moves eyes in direction of sounds.</li> <li>Responds to changes in tone of your voice.</li> <li>Notices toys that make sounds.</li> <li>Pays attention to music.</li> </ul>	<p><b>4-6 Months</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Babbling sounds more speech-like with many different sounds, including <i>p</i>, <i>b</i> and <i>m</i>.</li> <li>Vocalizes excitement and displeasure.</li> <li>Makes gurgling sounds when left alone and when playing with you.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7 Months-1 Year</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoys games like peek-o-boo and pat-a-cake.</li> <li>Turns and looks in direction of sounds.</li> <li>Listens when spoken to.</li> <li>Recognizes words for common items like "cup", "shoe," "juice."</li> <li>Begins to respond to requests ("Come here," "Want more?").</li> </ul>	<p><b>7 Months-1 Year</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Babbling has both long and short groups of sounds such as "tata upup bibibibi."</li> <li>Uses speech or non-crying sounds to get and keep attention.</li> <li>Imitates different speech sounds.</li> <li>Has 1 or 2 words (bye-bye, dada, mama) although they may not be clear.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1-2 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Points to a few body parts when asked.</li> <li>Follows simple commands and understands simple questions ("Roll the ball," "Kiss the baby," "Where's your shoe?").</li> <li>Listens to simple stories, songs, and rhymes.</li> <li>Points to pictures in a book when named.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1-2 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Says more words every month.</li> <li>Uses some 1-2 word questions ("Where kitty?" "Go bye-bye?" "What's that?").</li> <li>Puts 2 words together ("more cookie," "no juice," "mommy book").</li> <li>Uses many different consonant sounds of the beginning of words.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2-3 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understands differences in meaning ("go-stop," "in-on," "big-little," "up-down").</li> <li>Follows two requests ("Get the book and put it on the table.").</li> </ul>	<p><b>2-3 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has a word for almost everything.</li> <li>Uses 2-3-word "sentences" to talk and ask for things.</li> <li>Speech is mostly understood by familiar listeners</li> <li>Often asks for or directs attention to objects by naming them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3-4 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hears you when call from another room.</li> <li>Hears television or radio at the same loudness level as other family members.</li> <li>Understands simple, "who?," "what?," "where?," "why?" questions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3-4 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talks about activities at school or at friends' homes.</li> <li>People outside family usually understand child's speech.</li> <li>Uses a lot of sentences that have 4 or more words.</li> <li>Usually talks easily without repeating syllables or words</li> </ul>
<p><b>4-5 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pays attention to a short story and answers simple questions about it.</li> <li>Hears and understands most of what is said at home and in school.</li> </ul>	<p><b>4-5 years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voice sounds clear like other children's.</li> <li>Uses sentences that give lots of details (</li> <li>Tells stories that stick to topic.</li> <li>Communicates easily with other children and adults.</li> <li>Says most sounds correctly except a few like <i>l</i>, <i>s</i>, <i>r</i>, <i>v</i>, <i>z</i>, <i>ch</i>, <i>sh</i>, <i>th</i>.</li> <li>Uses the same grammar as the rest of the family.</li> </ul>

**Information for this handout was provided by The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) and Allison Martin MS SLP/CCC, Pediatric Speech Pathologist, UNC Hospitals.**

**ASHA can be reached at [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org) or**

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Rockville, MD 20852

**Toll-free, voice or TTY:**

Professionals/Students: 1-800-498-2071      Public: 1-800-638-8255

Available 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. ET

\* Reference for the speech and language milestone chart on page 4:

[http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/child\\_hear\\_talk.htm](http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/child_hear_talk.htm)

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