

Speech & language development (from 12 to 24 months)

Information for families

Great Ormond Street Hospital
for Children NHS Foundation Trust

The aim of this leaflet is to provide parents and carers with information and advice to help their child's speech and language to develop. The leaflet explains the normal stages of early speech and language development between 12 and 24 months. It aims to help you understand the stage at which your child is functioning and the activities you can do to stimulate and encourage further development. We recommend you speak to your child's speech and language therapist if you have any questions or concerns regarding any of the information enclosed.

The Second Year

There are a number of stages through which children will pass as they develop their speech and language skills after the first year. The ages given are meant only as a rough guide.

Stage 3 (9-18 months)

Understanding

In addition to listening for early words, it is still important to think about your child's understanding of words. For example, a child begins to understand some commonly used words such as 'mummy, daddy, ball, teddy, biscuit', depending on which words he hears often. Be aware that understanding of language will also be helped by the word occurring in context. For example, your child may show more understanding when language is used alongside a frequent routine such as bath time.

It is very common at this stage for your child to understand a lot more language than he can say. Estimates have suggested that, between the ages of one and two, a child can understand around five times more the number of words than they are able to say.

Talking

Towards the end of the first year or beginning of the second, your child may start to produce strings of sounds such as 'maba, gana' where the second consonant is different from the first. He or she may start to combine his talking with gestures such as pointing to what he or she wants, shaking his or her head to mean 'no' or waving 'byebye'.

He or she may begin to attempt words such as 'mama, dada'. Your child's vocalisations at this stage can sound more like real talking as the sounds are more melodic and rhythmical and go on for longer. Your child will also begin to use his or her voice to attract attention or make a demand.

The age at which a child begins to produce his or her first words varies enormously. Generally, once your child produces one or two words with meaning, he or she may start to use these words consistently. For example, initially, a dog or any other four legged animal may always be a 'woof!'.

Stage 4 (12 months onwards)

Understanding

Your child will soon be able to understand a range of single words and some simple questions accompanied by gestures – for example, ‘where is daddy?’ and follow short one step instructions – for example, ‘bring me your teddy’.

He or she will also develop an understanding of his or her daily routines and start to anticipate common everyday activities when he or she sees certain objects and hears familiar words. For example, dinnertime may be recognised by the words ‘dinner’ or ‘food, yummy’ and perhaps also by seeing a spoon or plate or bottle. Your child will also begin to associate names of objects with the object itself and may bring you a familiar object – for example, a shoe, from another room when asked to.

At this stage, your child will begin to be interested in listening to you naming body parts – for example, eyes or tummy, and will start to point to them when named. He or she will probably learn some new words each week.

Your child will enjoy bouncing, laughing, kicking, throwing, tugging, pushing away and pointing in order to communicate his needs. He or she will now be able to sustain interest in a book or pictures for two or more minutes, if helped by an adult.

Talking

Your child may now have an average of three clear words; for example ‘mama’, ‘dada’ and usually some familiar object name – for example, ‘car’ or ‘drink’. It will help if you repeat the words back to your child to provide a clear model and shape to these early words. He or she will use babble and a combination of words. Together with the use of intonation, this all helps to convey meaning.

Your child will also start to imitate familiar words on a more regular basis. Children love to copy! He or she will laugh and shout a great deal and make lots of noises and grunts. He or she will enjoy making the sounds of familiar animals and objects.

Stage 5 (18 months onwards)

Understanding

As your child's understanding continues to develop rapidly, he or she will be able to follow instructions containing two key words – for example, 'give me the spoon and the key'. He or she will also be able to understand some action words like 'sit down', 'come here'.

Your child will point and gesture to call your attention to an event or to show what he or she wants. He or she will also start to point to body parts – for example, eyes, nose, hair, tummy, when asked to do so.

He or she will probably be able to recognise and identify most common objects and pictures of common objects when they are named. He or she will be able to understand some complicated sentences and appears to understand the meaning of longer sentences.

Talking

From Stage 5 onwards your child will be able to say 'no' and 'mine' very clearly!! He or she will now use approximately 10 to 20 words, which includes peoples' names. He or she will start to say two words together such as 'all gone' and 'daddy bye-bye'. Sounds and words will be copied more accurately.

Don't worry if your child's words are not clear at this point. Your child will now know and say the names of a few objects. He or she will continue to babble, but with more meaningful words included.

He or she can hum and may sing simple tunes. He or she will enjoy nursery rhymes and especially the 'action rhymes' – for example, The wheels on the bus; Head, shoulders knees and toes.

At around two years of age your child will probably have built up a core vocabulary of about one to two hundred words, and learned to join two words together. It is important to remember that children at this stage often do not pronounce words clearly, and that this is perfectly normal. If this persists, then you should mention it to your child's doctor or speech and language therapist.

The Second Year: What you can do

Listening to sounds

Continue to introduce your child to new sounds and always tell and show him or her what makes the sound – for example, ‘that’s the doorbell ringing’. Introduce your child to symbolic sounds, which are sounds with meaning like ‘uh-oh’ when you have dropped something, and animal noises like ‘miaow’ when he or she sees a real cat or a picture of one.

Taking turns

Make a game of giving and receiving as your child begins to understand your requests and follow instructions – for example, ‘give me the car’. Play games that will allow for turn-taking – for example, rolling a ball to each other.

Learning new words

Help your child learn descriptive words by saying ‘Isn’t your icecream cold . . .’ or ‘do you want more spaghetti?’ Use new experiences to introduce new words to your child – for example, a visit to the playground (flowers, sand, swing). It is a good time to also introduce words such as ‘up’, ‘down’ e.g. ‘You are coming down the slide!’

Learning to categorise words that go together

At playtime, for example, name and show your child toys that are familiar to him – for example, car, ball, teddy - and say the word ‘toys’. Another good opportunity is mealtimes where you can introduce your child to the category ‘food’.

Give your child as many opportunities to use the words he or she has learnt. For example, keep his or her favourite toy out of reach but where he or she can see it and encourage him or her to ‘ask’ for teddy before you fetch it. Respond and reward your child’s effort at speaking even when his or her speech is not clear or if he or she does not say the word correctly.

If your child looks at his or her plate and say ‘getti’, you can say ‘would you like more spaghetti?’ In year two children often do not speak words clearly. However, a persistent problem might require the intervention of a speech and language therapist.

Play

Give your child things to feel and look at – for example, baby mirror or soft cuddly toys – and things to hold, shake and bang – for example, bells and bricks.

Encourage him or her to follow toys with his eyes – for example, blow bubbles/balloons in front of him or use finger puppets. You can also play hiding games with your child: let a piece of tissue or scarf fall over your head or cover a toy and encourage your child to pull it off. Play ‘pretend’ games with your child – for example, have pretend cups of tea. You could also have fun feeding teddies or dolls and putting them to bed.

Looking at books

Continue to encourage your child to look at books. As you look through the book, name and point to a familiar picture of an object in the book and then ask your child to point to it or say ‘where is the teddy?’

Nursery rhymes and songs

Listen to nursery rhymes or songs with your child or watch his or her favourite videos with him or her. You could also sing your child’s favourite nursery rhymes to him or her. Carry out the actions as you sing the words – for example, The wheels on the bus go round and round . When the songs and the words become familiar to your child, encourage him or her to fill in the sounds, actions or words which come at the end of the line – for example, ‘Heads and shoulders, knees and ____’

**Most importantly,
HAVE FUN
with your child!**

**If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet,
please telephone 020 7813 8110 and talk to your speech and
language therapist.**

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