

Language Development by Age Band (Birth to 18 Years)



Birth – 6 Months

The child is able to...

- Show a preference for looking toward people's eyes and faces
- Respond to a caregiver's voice by looking and listening
- Smile in response to caregiver
- Vocalize and babble in a back and forth manner

6 – 12 Months

The child is able to...

- Shift their eye gaze between people and objects
- Share emotions by looking at others, smiling, and using facial expressions
- Use their sounds and babbles to gain attention
- Pair gestures with eye contact
- Communicate frequently with others to request and protest
- Share what interests them with gestures, sounds and eye contact
- Participate in social routines such as peek-a-boo
- Imitate simple sounds and actions demonstrated by others (e.g. clapping, waving, silly sounds)
- Look up and/or turn towards the sound of their name being called

12 – 18 Months

The child is able to...

- Respond to others by looking and listening
- Pair gestures with sounds and words to direct communication
- Communicate nonverbally for many reasons (e.g., requesting, protesting, and starting social games).
- Use a range of gestures such as giving, showing, waving, pointing, and shaking one's head
- Recognize a caregiver's emotion (e.g., mirroring sadness, happiness)
- Imitate sounds and simple words
- Use early ritualized words such as "bye" and "no"
- Imitate and show off simple play actions (push a car, building with blocks)

18 – 24 Months

The child is able to...

- Use a variety of gestures, facial expressions and sounds across people and settings
- Use single words for not only object labels, but also people's names, action words, modifiers, and relational words (e.g., up, down, in)
- Take turns within interactions with others
- Communicate for many reasons (e.g., seeking comfort, greeting others, showing off)
- Share their enjoyment and interests with eye contact, smiles and sounds
- Demonstrate play actions with toys (e.g. pour a drink, feed a doll, put baby to bed)

24 – 36 Months

The child is able to...

- Use and understand combinations of words (e.g., Mommy go outside)
- Express and share simple emotions with words (e.g., Mommy is happy, I am mad)
- Request a soothing activity when distressed
- Request assistance from others
- Use simple self-regulatory language to maintain engagement within an activity (e.g., "first...then")

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3 - 4 Years

The child is able to...

- Understand and use more multi-word combinations including people's names, verbs, and nouns.
- Understand and use more sophisticated grammar (e.g., pronouns, possessives, tense)
- Request a break and/or soothing items when distressed
- Use self-regulatory language to talk through transitions between activities
- Recognize and describe emotions of oneself and others



4 - 5 Years

The child is able to...

- Use a range of creative language, including both simple and complex sentences
- Engage in short dialogues, such as recalling past events or simple stories
- Use some politeness terms or markers (e.g., please, thank you)
- Determine causes for emotions of self and others
- Use self-regulatory language to talk through more extended activities (e.g., multi-step instructions)
- Recognize and repair breakdowns in communication and express remorse



6 - 11 Years

The child is able to...

- Engage in conversation by staying on topic for extended interactions
- Balance comments and requests for information
- Adapt tone of voice to different listeners (e.g., adults versus peers)
- Provide essential background information based upon listener's perspective
- Initiate and maintain conversations that are related to the topic and the interests of others
- Think about the conversational partner's likes, dislikes and emotions
- Tell stories and enact social sequences role playing and visualizing an event before it takes place
- Use self-regulatory language to talk through multi-step activities and plan for future events



12 - 18 Years

The adolescent is able to...

- Understand and use nonverbal gestures, facial expressions, and gaze to express and follow subtle intentions (e.g., sarcasm and other nonliteral meanings)
- Understand and use tones of voice to express and follow emotional states
- Understand and use more sophisticated language (e.g. word choice) to provide background information for one's listener
- Understand and use more sophisticated language to describe relationships within conversation
- Understand reading passages and use written expression to share experiences
- Problem solve and self-monitor future, goal-directed, behavior (i.e., executive functioning)
- Perceive one's actions within social events and predict social behavior in others in order to self-monitor
- Effectively negotiate and collaborate within interactions with adults and peers