

Fact sheet:
Learning to speak and listen:
What to expect in the first five years



By the age of one, your baby should be able to:

- Understand simple commands, such as “no”
- Recognise their own name and understand the names of familiar objects or people
- Say “dad”, “mumma” and a few other words
- Try to make every day sounds, such as car and animal noises

By the age of two, your toddler should be able to:

- Say the names of pictures in a book and simple body parts, such as nose or tummy
- Understand simple questions, such as “where’s your shoe?”
- Have 50+ words that they use in their talking, and attempt using simple sentences
- Talk to themselves or their toys during play
- Sing simple songs, such as “Twinkle, twinkle, little star”

By the age of three, your child should be able to:

- Understand how objects are used - a crayon is something to draw with
- Follow two-step directions, such as “get your socks and put them in the basket”
- Use three to four word sentences, with basic grammar
- Enjoy telling stories and asking questions
- Be understood by adults familiar to them

By the age of four, your child should be able to:

- Understand shape and colour names
- Understand and ask who, what and why questions
- Use lots of words, about 900, usually in four to five word sentences
- Use correct grammar with occasional mistakes, such as “I falled down”
- Speak clearly enough to be understood by most people

By the age of five, your child should be able to:

- Understand nearly everything that is said at home or at preschool or at day care
- Use sentences of about six words, with correct grammar
- Explain why something happens, such as "Mum's car stopped because the petrol ran out"
- Follow three directions, for example, "Stand up, get your shoes on and wait by the door"
- Speak clearly enough to be understood by anyone

When to seek help

Every child develops their talking and listening skills at different rates, however there are general patterns to a child's language development.

If you are worried, about your child's speech, if your child sounds different to the ages and stages outlined, or if your three year old cannot be understood by adults, you may need to seek help from a speech pathologist.

More information

More information is available at Benalla Health.

Phone (03) 5761 4500 and ask to speak to a speech pathologist.